EMPIRE'S NEW CLOTHES:
UNDRESSING NEOLIBERAL DEVELOPMENT
THROUGH THE LENS OF AFRICAN PRINT TEXTILES/DRESS

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This project uses an industrial textile called *African print* as a lens into neoliberal capitalist development in the context of Ghana. *African print* was adapted from Javanese *batik* by Dutch imperialists, and supplied to markets in West and Central Africa starting in the mid-1800s. In the 1960s, the textile became the lynchpin of industrialization efforts in Ghana, and *African print* dress styles emerged as symbols of Black pride and resistance to cultural colonialism.

In the eighties, textiles manufacturing in Ghana witnessed perceptible declines with the introduction of neoliberal policies and projects. The once nationally prized industry faltered in the face of competition from more capitalized producers in the world market. While obviously critical, this focus on declining manufacturing reproduces a common, one-dimensional story of the wide-ranging changes that have refashioned African societies in the last decades. The trend in development studies has been to overlook profound transformations in African consumption: from the growth of retail infrastructure and practices, to the consolidation of capital and power in consumer markets, and the evolving significance of global brands in social life.

I examine *African print* markets in relation to the state, and competition between 'local', 'cheap', and 'luxury' brands manufactured in Ghana, China, and Holland, respectively. I argue for a relational approach that situates production and

consumption within the same analytic field, and enables a richer understanding of the dynamics of neoliberal development in Ghana. Tracing threads of *print* textiles uncovers the ongoing legacy of colonialism in neoliberal markets, and the remaking of socio-cultural meaning by multinational capital and the neoliberal state.

Importantly, *print* dress markets involve a range of garment producers, including informal workers in makeshift ateliers, small-scale entrepreneurs, and luxury fashion labels. With varying degrees of market power, artisanal crafts industries transform uncut fabric into custom-fit clothing. In the intimate exchange of ideas and services between textiles consumers and tailors lies the possibility of local advantage and promise; creativity is unleashed as the black body is dressed in confidence and style. While illuminating neoliberal transformations in Ghana, the lens of *African print* highlights broader patterns of socio-cultural change and capitalist development.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born to Sierra Leonean parents, Jumoke Warritay spent her childhood years in Kenya and Nigeria. Moving to the United States for higher education, she attained a Bachelor of Science at Northwestern University. In addition to teaching and post-graduate research, Jumoke has worked in the fields of education research, fundraising, and diversity and inclusion. Personal and professional experiences in multiple countries and urban contexts have cultivated Jumoke's interest in historical sociology, culture, race and ethnicity. Her research engages questions about markets, representations, inequality, and systems of oppression with the hope of disseminating critical, yet accessible, ideas and language for social analysis and change. Jumoke currently works as Associate Director of the Cornell Interactive Theatre Ensemble, an organization using theatre and dialogue to further diversity and inclusion.

To my mother, for your endless love

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PREFACE

The place of *African print* in social life and transcontinental trade makes it an especially interesting commodity to explore connections between neoliberal markets and social change. The textiles' production chains and consumption practices – its global and local threads – make visible a range of people, places and processes that are generally overlooked in development studies and political economy. Moreover, because its historical development reaches across industrialization projects, cultural dress practices, and fashion systems, *African print* possess the potential to connect often separated analysis in African studies, Euro-American social theory, cultural studies, and studies of dress and fashion.

Emerging from colonial relationships and trade in the 1800s, *African print* was folded into 'traditional' dress practices in West and Central Africa over time, and soaked with ethnic and regional meanings. In the middle of the Twentieth Century, *African print* featured in state-planned development projects that promoted textiles as the keystone of industrialization efforts in Ghana. Despite state supports, indeed some argue because of them, textiles manufacturing in Ghana declined in the late 1970s and dwindled further after the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs in the 1980s (de Valk 1996; Collier 2007). Today, manufacturers in Ghana, Holland and China are primary suppliers of *African print* to textiles markets in Ghana. Imports from China are the most prevalent in the market and are relatively 'cheap'; *prints* from Holland are marketed as high-end 'luxury' products for which consumers willingly pay a premium; *prints* from Ghana are uniquely positioned to respond to local cultural

needs, but their quality and price place them squarely between textiles from China and Holland. In addition to highlighting the construction of popular and niche consumer cultures, the structures and dynamics of *African print* markets reveal long histories of Dutch colonialism as well as new dominant interests from a globally emergent China.

Importantly, the ubiquity of *African print* products in neoliberal markets and their expanding use for 'traditional' dress and 'African' fashion, generates new investments in the informal economy of tailoring and the more formal but equally precarious fashion economy. The expansion of *African print* fashion is closely linked to growing fashion infrastructure in Ghana and (inter)national interest in 'African' fashion. In this respect, *African print* textiles serve as material for downstream or spin-off occupations in retail and garment production, modeling, fashion photography, blogging and the like. Recognizing the productivity of textiles/dress cultural economies becomes integral to a relational understanding of *African print* production and consumption, both historically and in the contemporary neoliberal moment.

Approaching production and consumption as interrelated and mutually constitutive processes reveals cultural dress as neither static nor separate from economic development. Cultural dress is (re)produced commercially and integrated into global markets through national development projects, fashion systems, and practices of identification and social differentiation. Through the lens of *African print,* we can see 'development' as the layered interweaving and interdependence of economy and culture, material and symbolic spheres, national and international policies, and the practices of industry and everyday actors.

CHAPTER 1

NEOLIBERAL RESTRUCTURING AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Research Problem: Development Representations and Common Sense

Despite global disquiet, the market reigns supreme. 'Free market', or neoliberal, ideas and values permeate all dimensions of social life – they shape everyday experiences and perceptions of 'common sense' (Gramsci 1971). Accordingly, social inequality is approached with technological and entrepreneurial solutions, and global inequality is framed in terms of 'developed', 'emerging' and 'frontier markets'. Production, meanwhile, is relocated to the most 'cost-efficient' locations, and livelihoods are increasingly vulnerable to the logic of company 'bottom lines'. Despite readily identifiable contradictions and incoherence in market ideology and lived experience, strong belief persists in market 'competition' and 'choice' as pillars of 'development'. While contested and resisted, 'free market' principles dominate. The dominance of neoliberalism makes it critically important to understand global capitalist culture, or market hegemony, and the ways it transforms social material life. Put differently, to better understand the present historical moment, we must ask how so-called 'free markets' are structured, and how they restructure everyday life?

Thinking about these questions in the context of a 'place' – specifically Ghana and West Africa more generally – I start with the observation that thirty years ago Structural Adjustment Programs installed 'free market' policies and neoliberal ideologies as 'development' common sense in West Africa.[1] In the interest of

[1] The development industry engages in hundreds of projects worldwide and serves as a major source of expatriate employment in countries the world over. The industry includes the United Nations; Bi-and Multi-national regional organizations (such as the EU, ECOWAS, African Union etc.); International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, IMF and Africa Development Bank; and international and indigenous Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Development is framed by these organizations, and related national projects aimed at meeting basic needs, raising measures of economic productivity, and facilitating good governance. However, internal contradictions within the

'competition', so-called 'free market' policies required the Ghanaian state to limit direct supports and protections for local textiles manufacturing, and granted foreign firms greater access to local markets. As state supports dwindled, manufacturing of *African print* textiles also declined (de Valk 1996; Quartey 2006).

At the same time, significant shifts occurred in the arrangement and operations of textiles and apparel manufacturing around the world. In the seventies, Europe and the United States saw massive outsourcing of textiles and garment production to regions with cheaper and less protected labor, especially in Asia and Latin America. A new form of 'globalization' emerged with complex networks of production and exchange connecting national economies, multinational firms, textiles and garment factory workers and consumers around the world (Colins 2003, Rosen 2002).[2] In accounts of this historical process, West African countries figure only marginally, and the multinational firms producing textiles for African consumer markets are seldom examined. Moreover, attention is rarely paid to the ways imports (re)structured textiles consumption in Ghana and other parts of Africa.

In sociology, the term 'consumption' refers to a complex set of processes including the purchase of goods and services as well as their selection, maintenance, repair, and disposal.[3] The process of consumption involves a variety of choices that

development industry raise important concerns. For one, lucrative and prestigious jobs in an industry designed to improve well-being and governance are inherently contradictory; they problematically reproduce imperial and colonial relations between foreign and local staff (Cooper and Packard 1998; Escobar 2011; Ferguson 1994).

[2] Textiles manufacturing in Latin America and Asia is the subject of important social commentary on issues like sweatshop labor practices, deindustrialization in Europe and the United States, transnational movement of capital and the effects of outsourcing labor, environmental damage, and the dangers of corporations engaging in a 'race to the bottom' in search of cheap labor. West African nations are generally omitted from these discussions.

[3] See here Campbell 1995. The study of consumption tends to be interdisciplinary but, one could argue, studies in anthropology have made the most notable contributions to galvanizing interest in consumption (Miller 1987, Douglas and Isherwood 1979, Appadurai 1986, Kopytoff 1986, McCracken 1990). In sociology, studies of consumption gained momentum in the 1980s thanks, in large part, to contributions by French social theorists (namely, Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Castells, de Certeau and Maffesoli) and ideas emerging from Nordic countries and the United Kingdom (especially Celia Lury at the University of Warwick; Don Slater at London School of Economics; Mike Featherstone at

occur at different levels. There are choices in: modes and practices of consumption; products and brands; social and individual forms of consumption; and consumption times, sites and spaces. While markets, shopping malls, and (online) stores are important elements, consumption extends beyond the moment of purchase and includes socio-cultural meanings ascribed to acquiring and possessing 'things'.[4] Studies in North America and Europe highlight consumption as a dynamic process that fuses cultural, material, and emotional elements, while also relating to identity formation, status, style and other expressions of selfhood, social differentiation and belonging.[5] Kate Soper (2008) describes consumption as having, "a two-fold and over-determined character, developed in relation to both the needs for physical survival and reproduction and to the more transcendent – and arguably often deflected and confounded – needs of the 'spirit'."[6] Shopping is a means to satisfy material needs as well as needs relating to cultural belonging, expressions of status, and individual or group subjectivity. What is important to observe is the "complexity of human consumption, its irreducible symbolic dimensions, and the difficulties of specifying some objective and supposedly naturally determined level of true 'needs' of the kind implicit in the arguments of those denouncing the 'falsity' of consumerist provision."[7]

Development studies give African consumption short shrift, and African consumers and markets are largely understudied.[8] The assumption, perhaps, is that African countries have little to contribute to analytic understandings of consumption

University of London; Colin Campbell at the University of York; and Agnes Rocamora at University of the Arts London). However, consumption still represents a marginal (but growing) sub-field of the discipline.

[4] See, for example, Simmel 1957, 1978; Frisby 1981; Miles 1998.

[5] The consumption literature exhibits a strong bias towards historical and contemporary experiences in Euro-America and 'global North'. Obviously, Eurocentric and American-focused analysis limits our thinking of what consumption means in other world contexts (Hebdige 1979; Lury 2011).

[6] Soper 2008: 574

[7] Soper 2008:575

[8] The sphere of consumption includes activities, spaces, people and relations involved in the marketing, sale (wholesale and retail), selection, use, disposal and recycling of goods and services by consumers. None of these elements is particularly well researched in relation to African development.

or that African consumption is too frivolous a concern on a continent ravaged by crises in production, politics, security, infrastructure, health, and education. Lack of scholarly attention to consumption limits our understanding of social life in African contexts and, by extension, limits the kinds of development questions asked and projects pursued.

For obvious reasons, livelihoods, means of production, and other 'economic' considerations occupy the attention of development research and practice in Africa. However, viewing the 'economy' as a separate sphere is an invention of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Polanyi 1944; Mitchell 2008), tied to geopolitics, national outcomes, employment, and the like.[9] The 'economy' is often framed as important and dynamic, while 'culture' is assumed to be connected to relatively old and stable 'traditions', and assumed to be less important to development. 'Economy' and 'culture' are frequently separated and ranked, respectively, as first and second order categories. The analytic tendency to separate 'economy' and 'culture' relies on reducing and abstracting what should be dynamic, historical categories.

Additionally, social spheres are increasingly separated with capitalism – the system of 'wage-labor' that removes workers from their direct means of survival (namely productive land) and creates dependence on an invisible but pervasive market 'system' to satisfy daily needs (Marx 1976; Wood 1999; Polanyi 1944; Harvey 1989; Federici 2004). Capitalist production is perceived as the sphere of 'work' associated with wages, shifts, and hours in the public realm of the factory, the office, and the farm. By contrast, consumption, which occurs in markets, stores, and the private domain of the home, is associated with social reproduction and the satisfaction of

[9] See the discussion in Polanyi (1944) of a 'self-regulating' market, and Mitchell (2008) for a discussion of the rise of the 'economy' in the 1950s.

material and symbolic needs. [10] Despite the connections and interdependence of capitalist production and consumption, the subjects of 'producer' and 'consumer' stand apart as seemingly disconnected individuals. Moreover, there is a tendency to associate consumption with leisure, frivolity and wastefulness, and to minimize its productive character. Prioritizing 'economy' creates a 'productionist bias' that underemphasizes or ignores the importance, simultaneity, productivity, and unity of 'consumption' and 'culture'.[11]

As with production, relations of consumption occur in specific social conditions that express both social power and inequalities. However, Mike Featherstone warns against regarding consumption as "unproblematically derived from production", and contends that the "*culture* of consumption" deserves analysis in its own rite (Featherstone 1991:13, emphasis in original).[12] The temptation to posit consumption and production as antonyms or ranked spheres can lead analysis astray. *Production, distribution, exchange, consumption, and material culture* comprise distinct but connected 'parts' of capitalism (Fine 1995; Campbell 1995). Consumption does not gain its significance directly from production (or in opposition to it) but, rather, is significant in itself and in relation to other 'parts' in the 'whole' system of capitalism. Economy and culture, like production and consumption, are

[10] Of course, public goods are also produced and consumed, and sundry non-commodified and de-commodified forms of exchange exist in capitalist societies. Public goods and services, and the topic of collective consumption, are extensively investigated in literatures across economics, urban sociology, and political economy (Samuelson 1954, Castells 1977, 1978, 1983). Non-commodified and de-commodified objects take the form of gifts, family heirlooms, inheritances, and a variety of sacred or 'priceless' items – such as art pieces, relics and cultural artifacts (Appadurai 1986).

[11] See Urry 1990:277. The separation of 'economy' and 'culture, and resulting productionist bias, is especially problematic in orthodox Marxism which emphasizes distinction between an economic 'base' which determines the 'superstructure'. This rigid reading of Marx productionist downplays the importance of viewing culture and economy as mutually constitutive and interrelated facets of historical development.

[12] See the following for critical examinations of consumption in capitalist development: Miller 1987, McCracken 1990; Featherstone 1991; Brewer and Porter 1993; Lee 1993.

concurrent processes that are mutually constitutive and constituted by capitalist development (Williams 1977; Jameson 1981).

As Lawrence Grossberg (2010) succinctly expresses, the danger in subordinating culture or consumption is that, "Too often, and not simply by chance or necessity, many of the most intimate forms of social relations and practices, forms that often sustain and nurture us, that give us joy and pleasure, that bore and sometimes overwhelm us, fall by the analytic wayside."[13] Oftentimes, in the economistic world of development research and practice, questions about African consumption and consumer practices, and their material and symbolic significance, fall by the analytic wayside. A richer more nuanced understanding of 'development' is possible when the seemingly distinct elements of 'economy' and 'culture', 'production', 'distribution', and 'consumption' are viewed as relational, unified parts of social material life. [14] The point is not to equate economy with production and culture with consumption, but to highlight how each constitutes the other and are thereby transformed *relationally*, rather than as sharply juxtaposed antinomies. In pursuing relational analysis, I join scholars who propose an economic approach to consumption and a more cultural approach to production (Du Gay 1996; McDowell 1997; Grossberg 2010).

Recent interest in Africa's so-called 'middle class' is a notable exception to the general neglect of consumption in African development. [15] Reports by development agencies and literature acknowledge the growing populations in 'sub-Saharan Africa' with consumption habits and lifestyles in step with global 'middle class' norms.[16]

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[13] Grossberg 2010:5

[14] In addition, dynamic processes are often represented as stable categories or objects, and artificial separations are made between analytic 'ideas' and 'reality'. Other important dualisms that separate and rank related spheres include constructed divisions between the 'rational' and 'emotional', and 'individual' and 'social'. While each category points to important elements, each relates to and shapes the other in important ways.

[15] Milanovic and Yitzhaki 2002; Banerjee and Duflo 2008; McCrummen 2008.

[16] The category of 'Sub-Saharan Africa' (SSA) is code for Black Africa, and often used to describe the poorest countries on the continent. Predominantly Arab countries and South Africa are generally

According to a report by the consulting company Accenture, approximately 856 million consumers across 'sub-Saharan Africa' spent approximately $600 billion on consumer goods in 2010.[17] Shopping complexes selling luxury goods, fitness centers, cable television, gated communities, and home mortgages – trimmings associated with idealized representations of the 'middle class' in so-called 'developed' nations – are noticeably present and expanding in African countries. The business literature, which is generally ahistorical and uncritical, celebrates African 'market opportunities' and the buying potential of Africa's 'middle class' consumers (Mahajan 2008).[18] Business and development studies generally frame this class as a 'new' and emergent social group and, somewhat arbitrarily, define it as populations living between the mean incomes of Brazil and Italy or, in the 'least developed' countries, those living somewhere between $2 and $13 a day.[19] In reality, African middle classes and consumption have long histories related to social reproduction in context as well as global exchange (Prestholdt 2008; Warritay 2010).

Current interest in Africa's 'middle class' is largely premised on the hope that the presence of the 'middle class', even in diminutive form, will unlock new economic potential, and provide civic and political leadership. These notions hail, in part, from beliefs that in 'Western' society the 'middle class' is a source of economic

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excluded from 'sub-Saharan' as, allegedly, 'developed' or non-Black regions. When included, South Africa is acknowledged as a regional powerhouse and, consequently, excluded from measures of 'frontier' markets.

[17] Hatch et al 2010. Remissions and foreign contract work are believed to account for significant increases in 'middle class' purchasing power. According to a McKinsey report in May 2012, global consumer spending in 2010 was estimated at $28 trillion. This figure places African consumer at a meager 2.2% of global spending. For consumers in African countries, the availability of goods belies the global significance of their consumption.

[18] A notable exception is Henning Melber's (2016) article which queries definitions of the 'middle class' and asks critical questions about how influential Africa's rising 'middle class' can be.

[19] Measures of the 'middle class' vary greatly with some proposing the 'middle class' household consumption falls between $2-$13 (Ravallion 2009), $4-$10 (Sumner 2012), and $10-$100 (UNDP 2013). Discussions of Africa's 'middle class' often rely on colloquial understandings of the term, and employ arbitrary income levels to identify middle class membership.

development and a 'driving force of nations.'[20] The tendency has been to perceive the lifestyles, material possessions, and cultural 'tastes' of the 'middle class', especially formally educated, salaried, 'white collar' professionals, as a reflection or aspiration of 'modern' 'Western' normality. In line with this thinking, threats to the 'middle class' have been portrayed as threats to the health and well-being of the nation, while expanding the 'middle class' has been promoted as a principal objective of modernizing, democratizing, and liberalizing capitalist projects (Owensby 2002). The 'middle class' in 'non-Western' countries has been understood against these 'Western' ideals, and has been transformed into a reified, overburdened, yet understudied, sociological category (Fernandes 2006). Pointing to the difficulty of the concept Loic Waquant explains, "The middle class is necessarily an ill-defined entity. This does not reflect a lack of theoretical penetration but rather the character of reality. [Studies] of the middle class should consciously strive to capture this essential ambiguity…rather than dispose of it" (Waquant 1991:57). In my view, referring to the 'middle classes' enables greater appreciation of the ambiguity of multifarious and fragmented middle groups, while also moving us away from underspecified or monolithic notions of the 'middle class'.

In Ghana, middle classes exist between extremes of poverty and prosperity. In 2013, over 25 percent of the population was estimated to live in poverty, with the highest poverty rates concentrated in the Upper East, Upper West, and Northern regions.[21] Among the poorest households, subsistence is a daily struggle, with no guarantees to food, shelter, and other basic goods. While low-wage workers – such as

[20] As far back as the 1800s the middle class was identified as a 'driving force of nations'(Nabuco (1863 [2003]). Studies also linked 'Western' societies with small middle classes and high inequality to low levels of growth and limited capital accumulation (Adelman and Morris 1967; Landes 1998; Galor and Zeira 1993) Furthermore, development theories associated the leadership of urbanized middle classes with successful modernization and democratization (see Lipest 1964; Fernandes 2006)

[21] See here Cooke, 2016. Poverty rates in the Upper East, Upper West, and Northern regions reached as high as 45 per cent.

street vendors, haulers, domestic workers, guards, laborers, service providers, and small-scale agriculturalists – struggle to make ends meet, they also are consumers. The provision of inexpensive goods in liberalized markets offers poor consumers new possibilities of acquiring a range of previously out-of-reach products. On the other end of the social spectrum, Ghana's 80 richest people controlled 6.4 percent of the GDP in 2015, and comprised a fast-growing segment of multimillionaires.[22] The richest families flitter from one context (and country) to another, enjoying mansions, private jets, luxury vehicles, designer clothing, and a range of exclusive experiences outside the public view.

Ghana's middle classes are expanding within this context of growing inequality. The upper, or more privileged, segments of the middle classes include state officials, successful entrepreneurs, artists, architects and designers, managers of enterprise, consultants, accountants, lawyers, engineers, doctors and other salaried professionals. Formal education and specialized expertise lend prestige to their occupations and augment their social power and authority. Their economic and social capital is manifested in lifestyle choices, leisure activities, conspicuous displays of consumption, and appearances in social circles of high esteem. Segments of the upper middle classes are 'returnees' and 'Afropolitans' (Tuakli-Wosornu 2008) with foreign degrees and work experiences, and cosmopolitan sensibilities. Among other shared practices, members of the upper middle classes patronize grocery stores, boutiques, and restaurants, even if infrequently; they purchase satellite television, wear expensive weaves, and belong to exclusive social clubs.

The lower, or less privileged, segments of the middle classes include low-paid civil servants and salaried workers such as assistants, nurses, and teachers, as well as

[22] A majority of Ghana's wealthiest individuals are engaged in commodity imports and entrepreneurship, and are beneficiaries of inherited wealth.

supervising employees in factories, ports, construction and the like. Also included in the lower middle classes, depending on the scale and quality of their operations, are self-employed and direct producers such as artisans, hairstylists, and tailors. Estimates suggest that as much as 80 percent of the total labor force in Ghana works in the precarity of the informal economy, and a range of occupations in the lower middle classes exist within this sector.[23] Consumption within the lower middle classes takes on a more informal character; goods are purchased from street hawkers in traffic, from wares neatly arranged or piled high on sidewalks, from roadside kiosks, and food vendors on the street. To be sure, consumers across classes buy street food and make purchases from vendors weaving between stopped traffic, however, the practice of regularly purchasing goods 'off the street' is the mainstay of consumers in the lower (middle) classes. While Ghanaians in the lower middle classes consume more than those living in poverty, the boundaries between less privileged segments of society are fluid and, for most, resources are scarce and daily life is difficult.

The discussion above attempts to sketch important internal differentiations within the middle classes in Ghana, and connects economic, or occupational, standing to consumption.[24] Though permeable and filled with the potential of upward mobility, boundaries between classes are reproduced through everyday consumption practices and 'tastes' that construct class identities in material and symbolic ways.[25] Furthermore, various other intersecting identities such as ethnicity, age, religion, and gender shape the middle classes and order social life. The changes sparked by

[23] According to the International Labor Organization (2002), informal employment comprises more than 70 percent of all employment in sub-Saharan Africa. While this figure is dated, at the time of fieldwork, informal employment clearly exceeded the availability of formal opportunities. See Schaefer-Kehnert (2015) for more recent exposition of the informal economy.
[24] Without constructing formal definitions or boundaries of class in Ghana, I wish to sketch a relative understanding of class – poverty and wealth in relation to the differentiated classes between.
[25] See Owensby (2002) and Davis (2004) for discussion of class identities, and Bourdieu (1984) for treatment of 'taste'.

liberalization transformed markets as well as practices related to identity formation, and the making of social groups and hierarchies. Specifically, the proliferation of consumer goods and media images depicting privileged lifestyles constructed 'middle class' consumption as an aspirational norm. Increasingly, consumers across classes are encouraged and expected to use particular commodities and brands to construct their identity and make symbolic claims to upward mobility. From this view, everyday consumption is an important expression of neoliberal transformations, and new forms of social differentiation can be observed in the conflicting values and practices of consumption.

Recent changes to retail distribution, specifically the expansion of shopping malls, provide a visible example of the links between consumption and social change in the new market. In 2006, Ghana's first so-called 'world class shopping mall' opened in Accra, paving the way for construction of more malls across the country. Malls accommodate and shape Ghana's (upper) middle classes; they provide a 'comfortable' alternative to open-air markets and promote corporate sales staff rather than market traders as significant retail figures. Between 2014 and 2016, consultants expected the number of shopping centers across Africa to double from 242 shopping centers to 421.[26] The anticipated surge in consumption infrastructure has prompted business interests to suggest that Africa is the next, and possibly last, retail 'frontier', and the region likely to yield the fastest growth in the next decades.[27] Another scramble for Africa is underway, this time for space to build shopping malls, parking lots, and consumer loyalty.

How one interprets recent transformations in consumption depends, in part, on one's perception of 'Africa' more generally. 'Africa' is a cultural construct. The

[26] Sagaci Research, June 12, 2014.
[27] See here Robertson 2012.

term's diffuse uses in academic and lay conversations employ familiar referents rooted in ideas about biology, race, and culture. As an abstract category, 'Africa' is imagined or, as V.Y. Mudimbe (1988) puts it, 'invented'. When the multiplicity of ethnicities, religions, gender relations, classes and cultural practices on the continent are considered it is clear that any attempt to describe 'Africa' relies on geographical and racial reductivism. Yet, 'Africa' is deployed in development research and practice with two predominant representations: one view is of a continent characterized by dysfunction and despair – a 'discourse of dysfunction' – and the other celebrates Africa's abundant promise, potential for market growth, and ripeness for business – a discourse of 'market triumphalism'. Through simplification, *development representations* make the continent more intelligible to practitioners, investors, scholars, philanthropists, and the wider public. However, emphasis on deprivation ignores, or minimizes, growing consumption and culture economies in West Africa, while market triumphalism frames African consumption as a new frontier; one representation diminishes complexity, the other denies history.[28]

My intention here is not to suggest that all development studies and projects fall into one of these two representations but, rather, to recognize the pervasiveness and limitations of these two stereotypes of 'Africa'. Development representations are important because they introduce ideas, images, and beliefs about 'progress' in ways that shape our ideas about 'African' problems and possible interventions. How we understand the problems of poverty, disease, corruption, conflict, and markets depends on how 'Africa' is represented in the first place, and what these representations either illuminate or obscure. It is not enough for a critical view to ask what a representation

[28] Of course, these two characterizations cannot encapsulate the broad range of development projects and perspectives in circulation; the two discourses outlined above merely highlight common approaches to development in African contexts. Consider, for example, approaches to health, education, and (food) security – typically, these domains are approached with a sense of dysfunction or deprivation.

omits or whether it is true or false. We must ask what even the crudest falsity inspires. As Robert Bocock (1996) reminds us, "myths, which are literally false, have powerful meanings and real effects." [29] On the one hand, longstanding myths of Africa's backwardness and inadequacies are reproduced by one-sided representations of persistent deficiency and dysfunction. On the other hand, narrow representations limit our sociological and development imaginations, and our understandings of social problems; they reproduce dangerous stereotypes which Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie (2009) references as the 'single story'. [30] Myths and stereotypes about 'Africa' are challenged by expanding representations, not simply supplanting bad ones for better ones. The goal is to represent and analyze more of the complexity of 'Africa'.

Applying the ideas above, this dissertation examines 'free market' development in Ghana through the lens of *African print* textiles production, distribution, and consumption. The conventional representation of textiles development in Ghana is that of industrial decline. I expand the analytic view of textiles 'development' by bringing under investigation consumer markets, corporate branding and retail, and symbolic and material elements of textiles/dress consumption and practices.[31] In so doing, structural inequalities of textiles development become clear, the influences of foreign capital are revealed, links between the market and social differentiation appear, and a variety of overlooked actors come into view as important development subjects.

[29] Bocock 1996:157. False notions of African or Black inferiority bolstered racist systems of slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow, South African Apartheid, and other forms of discrimination on the African continent and Diaspora.
[30] Chimamanda Adichie. "The Danger of a Single Story" Ted Talk, 2009.
[31] Throughout, I use the backslash in constructions to represent the connecting thread between two intimately related spheres or domains – i.e. 'textiles/dress', 'dress/fashion', 'national/cultural' etc.

Literature Review: Conventional and Alternative Approaches

African print is an industrial commodity with symbolically meaningful mass markets and productive cultural practices linked to both 'traditional' and 'fashion' dress systems. As such, the analytical threads of *print* textiles connect wide, at times, incongruent academic terrain – they bring scholarship on the historical development of capitalism into conversation with anthropological studies of dress and fashion studies. Despite heavy focus on social relations in Euro-America, scholarship on the origins of capitalism and fashion provide important theories and analytical concepts for understanding 'development' in 'Africa'.[32] Moreover, Euro-American interests are central to the histories of imperialism, slavery, and colonialism; so-called 'development' of one region could not have occurred without domination of others. 'Africa' is not positioned to reproduce the historical processes of extraction, exploitation, and appropriation that created contemporary geopolitical unevenness. Despite assumptions to the contrary, studies of capitalist development and modern dress in Euro-American contexts both relate to Africa, and provide useful concepts and frameworks for analyzing African development and cultural dress markets.

For most of the Twentieth Century, American consumer capitalism shaped mass consumption the world over. Starting in the twenties, Fordist production – based on standardized production for mass anonymous markets – expanded provision of low-cost goods to mass markets and, simultaneously, provided wages that allowed workers to afford their own products.[33] As Fordism expanded, media and advertising interests 'educated' the general public on how to consume; new techniques in branding, packaging, marketing, and advertising emerged to introduce the 'will to

[32] This is not to suggest that African countries will follow Euro-America's trajectory – teleological theories of development have long been discredited.
[33] Henry Ford's organization employed unskilled workers whose production in moving assembly lines with specialized machines delivered unprecedented output. Compensated with a 'living' wage, Ford workers enjoyed access to consumption previously unattainable to many in the working class.

consume' into everyday consciousness (Ewen 1976). Advertising and marketing industries began dismantling established cultural formations within the (extended) family and supplanting them with notions of national consumer culture – essentially promoting an 'American' way of life tied to specific commodity relations.[34] Increasingly, the household and its nuclear family members were defined as consumption units and targeted by consumption campaigns. Marxist scholars suggest the commodity stands as a thing without explicit social meaning (Lee 1993:16), and the primary function of marketing and advertising is to "refill the emptied commodity with meaning" (Jhally 1989:221). It follows then that consumers do not simply satisfy inherent 'needs'; needs and meanings are actively constructed by producers, advertisers, and social pressures.[35]

Following World War II, the commercial boom in the United States expanded mass consumption and normalized unprecedented consumerism. Retail infrastructure in the form of store fronts, department stores, and eventually strip and shopping malls dotted (sub)urban landscapes, encouraging and accommodating growing consumption (Slater 1997; Lee 1993). Shopping practices moved towards faster, more frequent, and more standardized shopping experiences (Goodman and Cohen 2004), and intensified the ubiquity and reach of commodities in daily life.

A fundamental shift in gender relations occurred with the linking of mass consumption with women and the objectification of the female body in the service of selling commodities. As producers targeted household 'needs', they simultaneously invited women to improve home-making and associated women with the domestic sphere. Associations of this kind conjured the workplace as a masculine realm and

[34] The fantasy of a house with a white picket fence, home appliances and other trimmings of American middle classness, was conjured through marketing and advertising.
[35] Accordingly, advertising, marketing, and the media actively reconstruct understandings of use-value, aesthetic possibilities, and social need.

shopping as the more 'frivolous' sphere of women. Paradoxically, marketing lured women to shop for the household and increased pressures to intensify bodily upkeep, at the same time as shopping was belittled as a feminine pastime.[36] Representations of shopping as a natural female propensity and stereotypes of fanatical female shoppers obscure the historical development of consumption, as well as the relations of consumption that structure 'needs' and the tendency to consume (Vickery 1993; Brewer and Trentmann 2006).[37] Similarly, second wave feminist critiques of fashion and beauty practices tended to criticize consumer culture's cooption of early demands of feminism, and to oversimplify or overlook the importance and internal tensions of fashion and beauty politics and expression.[38]

In contrast, Janice Winship (1983) seek to understand how the 'new woman' understands herself as an independent, feminine, attractive, and family-oriented consumer who reworks mass commodities in service of her own creativity and self-expression. In addition, she shows how advertising has played a critical role in representing women's bodies as sites of action for commercial products; how every body part, from eyelashes to fingernails, is subject to enhancement with the 'right' commodity. Cultural ideals of feminine beauty are constructed through marketing and consumption (Winship 1983; Berger 1972; Myers 1986), and more recent work highlights the importance of recognizing inequalities in beauty ideals as they relate to sexuality, race, class and body size (Weekes 2002; Johnston and Taylor 2008). As (particular) women's bodies are objectified and targeted by marketing, social messages are conveyed about how women should be valued, and the practice of judging women in terms of their appearance is normalized. There is a contradictory

[36] Firat and Dholakia 1998:19
[37] In fact, women are disproportionately targeted by consumer marketing, and just as easily perceive shopping as shopping 'recreational' as it is 'laborious' (Prus and Dawson 1991).
[38] Wilson 1985:13; Lury 2011:123

centrality and marginality of women in consumption. As Celia Lury puts is, "while women have been central to the development of consumer culture, this centrality is as much a consequence of their objectification as it is of their role as active consumers" (Lury 2011: 129).

Considering women's role in consumption from another perspective, Rachel Bowlby (1985) suggests that the use of display windows to market goods to women serves as a form of entertainment and, for homemakers, an escape from the drudgery of domestic labor. From this perspective, consumption is an empowering outlet, and a space that women should embrace. Expressing a similar idea, Mica Nava (2002) suggests that consumption provides women a realm in which to exercise authority and expertise, and new forms of income. Consumption from this view leads to a sense of freedom and empowerment believed to have the potential to spill over into demands for more rights. These different perspectives on consumption share the recognition of consumption as a gendered process in which women feature as prominent actors.

The commodities that are purchased both represent and reproduce social differences; they offer successive generations the 'opportunity' to create new forms of distinction. Acquiring what is 'new', 'classy', 'cool', 'authentic' or 'stylish' not only differentiates individuals and social groups, it simultaneously "differentiates the process of consumption" by determining which products are bought and which are not (Aglietta 1987:157). Promotional industries appeal to the motivating forces of sexuality, power, guilt, envy, 'good taste', and glamour. Presenting products with stylized, hyperbolic imagery of pleasure, they entice consumers to dream-up and desire specific products (Berger 1972). Scholars of the 'culture industry' have evaluated these actions as 'manipulation' (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972), and the 'theft and appropriation' of meaning (Jhally 1989). However, product promotion does not impose choices on consumers in totalizing, unidirectional, or unilateral ways –

consumer consciousness and sensibilities continuously modify ideas about products, their uses, and meanings (Tetzlaff 1991). Consumers are not hapless dupes, but an active public capable of self-conscious choice, expression, and social messaging that can redefine the meanings of commodities in social life. As such, understanding relations of consumption goes beyond commodity fetishism and beliefs about consumer manipulation, and require understanding producers, consumers, and distributers relationally.

Studies of capitalism often turn attention to the global influence of the United States. American capitalism expanded in the second half of the Twentieth Century, penetrating new world markets through processes of 'massification' and 'intensification' (Lee 1993:123).[39] As American firms reached deeper into foreign markets and social space, concerns emerged about the growing influence of corporatism in public and cultural spheres and the impact of market processes described variably as McDonaldization (Ritzer 1993), Disneyization (Bryman 1999), and Logo-ization Klein (2000).[40] At the same time, transformations in information communication technologies and shifts towards small-batch and niche production turned attention to fast-changing marketplaces. Firms increasingly sought to target different consumer groups with goods produced with characteristics suitable for particular tastes and fashions. Processes described as 'globalization', 'post-Fordism', and 'flexible specialization' identified significant shifts in the world economy starting in the seventies and continuing to the 'neoliberal' present. Flexible manufacturing

[39] The terms *massification* and *intensification* refer to Marx's concepts of *absolute-* and *relative-surplus value*, and indicate two forms of capitalist expansion. In massificiation, capital pushes the limits of time and space (i.e. extending the work day and creating larger markets. In the process of intensification, capital qualitatively changes configurations of labor and use of technology creating greater efficiency and innovation. Both processes were at play in the 1980s, with intensification perhaps comprising the more significant part of what was called 'globalization'.

[40] As time has made clear, local cultures are not wholly 'under threat' of 'corruption' by corporate and commercial cultures. Despite the spread and dominance of capitalist cultures, especially its American forms, 'local', 'hybrid', and 'creole' cultural and market forms persist around the world.

enables producers to cater to specialized lifestyles, with increasingly customized marketing (Featherstone 1991).

Referencing heightened self-reflexivity and self-fashioning in so-called 'advanced capitalism', postmodern scholars argue that 'lifestyles' explain new social identities and social divisions in Euro-American contexts. Contemporary consumption, it is suggested, unsettles or overturns notions of fixed social hierarchies, and creates fragmented social identities and 'open' sign systems that allow for the total reconstruction of the self (see here Baudrillard 1988; Jameson 1991, Maffesoli 1996). As Ewen and Ewen argue, "Today there is no fashion: there are only *fashions*...No rules, only choices…Everyone can be anyone" (Ewen and Ewen 1982:249-51, emphasis in original). While elements of dissipated or disorganized hierarchy exist, especially in contrast to feudal, imperial, and colonial social structures, the discriminatory nature of markets and social hierarchies contradict postmodern suggestions of total social fluidity. Class divisions, gendered processes, and ranked forms of social differentiation are continuously remade through stratifying market processes and practices.

However, postmodern scholarship has brought more attention to the importance of increased commodification, the proliferation of consumer goods, the expansion of consumption sites (including the Internet), and intensified media marketing (and consumer research) in Euro-American societies. Some suggest the 'consumer culture' that emerged from these processes is *the* defining feature of 'advanced' capitalism (Miles 1998) and, that in the neoliberal moment, "consumer choice is the obligatory pattern for all social relations and the template for civic dynamism and freedom" (Slater 1997:10).[41] Reaching farther back in history, some

[41] Whether or not consumption is *the* organizing force of contemporary capitalism is beyond the scope of this project. For the present purposes, I wish to stress that consumption is a critically important element of market-led 'development' and related social relations, dynamics, and structures.

scholars have sought to re-write the history of capitalism with consumption as the primary thrust, claiming that a Consumer Revolution preceded the Industrial Revolution (Agnew 1986; Brewer and Porter 1993; Braudel 1973; Fine and Leopold 1990; McCracken 1990; McKendrick et al. 1983; Porter 1982).

In short, the argument is that competitions in dress, or new fashions, emerged in London in the Sixteenth Century, at the same time as goods from faraway places spread across different parts of what today is Europe.[42] Fashion's obsession with novelty and distinction encouraged increased consumption. The dual forces of fashion and foreign goods shifted demand in ways that made possible the subsequent absorption of industrial commodities produced in the Industrial Revolution (McKendrick et al. 1983). Production and consumption extended across disparate geographical locales and social milieus shaped by a history of metropole and colonial relations – for example, cotton and the classical triangular trade. The debate about whether the Consumer Revolution preceded the Industrial Revolution, or vice versa, is not pertinent to this project and the complexities of the origins of capitalism are beyond the scope of the present study. What is interesting and relevant is the importance of 'foreign' textiles and 'local' fashions to the origins of mass

[42] The Sixteenth Century reign of Queen Elizabeth I is identified as an especially transformative era in European consumption practices. The Queen, known for her own ostentatious dressing habits, invited noblemen and women to her court and, compelled her guests to present themselves in new and creative clothing. Apparently, this generated new forms of consumption-driven competition (Goodman and Cohen 2004:6-7; McCracken 1985). New markets followed these social changes, especially in London where shopping infrastructure and consumer goods were concentrated (Slater 1997: 17). The early 'modern' fashion system extended dramatically beyond the court in the Eighteenth Century as cheap imported calico and muslin from India became popular (Breen 1993). Food items such as sugar, tea, and coffee shifted from luxury to common items, and enabled increased production (Mintz 1985). Other important changes in consumption are noted in the so-called 'luxury' debates and the argument for a 'Romantic ethic' as the 'spirit' of modern consumerism (Campbell 1987). The crux of these arguments is that perceptions of consumption transformed in the Romantic era to condone private pleasure and represent it as publically beneficial. Much like Protestantism propelled production, it is argued that Romanticism (with its emphasis on experience, imagination, and creative expression) promoted consumption.

consumption and, as is commonly recognized, the significance of textiles to the history of industrial manufacturing.

Textiles, dress and fashion are additionally interesting because of their capacity to capture, in a flash, signs that can be 'read' and used to communicate historical time, gender, profession, class, status, cultural aesthetics, among other indvidiual and social markers. The consumption literature highlights how both the shopping experience and use of goods enable construction of a personal 'image' and 'identity'. The body emerges from this angle as the site of contested cultural representations and the 'embodiment' of social values (Bourdieu 1984; Entwistle 2000). As Elizabeth Wilson puts it:

> "We live as far as clothes are concerned a triple ambiguity: the ambiguity of capitalism itself with its great wealth and great squalor, its capacity to create and its dreadful wastefulness; the ambiguity of our identity, of the relation of self to body and self to the world; and the ambiguity of art, its purpose and meaning" (Wilson 1985:14-15).

However, the tendency in Euro-American scholarship and development representations has been to deny African dress the same existence, co-temporality, and dynamism as Euro-American dress and fashion systems. Academic literature framed African dress as 'traditional' 'costume' and only recently recognized its changing fashions. Despite historical evidence to the contrary, scholars argued that 'fashion' derived from a particular historical experience in 'Western modernity' and, consequently, did not apply to dress in 'Africa'. [43] Strongly held beliefs continue to link modern fashion to Euro-America, and represent Africans as stuck in the 'traditional' past.

[43] Recognizing the long history of African fashion goes against the dominant definition of fashion as an "historically and geographically specific system for the production and organization of dress, emerging over the course of the Fourteenth Century in the European courts, particularly the French court of Louis XIV, and developing with the rise of mercantile capitalism" (Entwistle 2000:44). For other scholarship supporting the notion of fashion as a European discovery see Bell 1976, Finkelstein 1991, Flügel 1930, Laver 1969 [1995], Polhemus and Proctor 1978, Rouse 1989, Veblen 1953, Wilson 1985).

For example, quoting Wilson (1985) again, she suggests, "Western fashions have overrun large parts of the so-called third world. In some societies that used to have traditional static styles of dress, the men, at least those in the public eye, wear western men's suits – although their national dress might be better adapted to climate and conditions."[44] While 'Africa' is not named specifically, it seems fair to assume that 'some societies' in the 'third world' would include African nations. Wilson's statement suggests various problematic intimations: first, it imagines 'traditional' dress cultures in the 'third world' as static; second, she suggests the existence of 'national dress'; and third, she assumes clothing in the 'third world' should be well suited for the climate or, in other words, functional.

In response, I would argue that people in the 'third world' who wear Western suits likely live in places that have exchanged material culture with the 'Western' world for decades if not hundreds of years – over the centuries of exchange, dress in the 'third world' has not been static. Second, ethnic dress cultures seldom map wholly onto national boundaries as most nations are constituted by various ethnic and cultural groups. 'Third world' societies do not necessarily have 'national dress'. Flipping the question, it is as if one were to ask, 'What is the 'national dress' of the United States, the United Kingdom, or France?' If 'national dress' ideas exist, they are likely the product of nation building projects which must be explained historically rather than assumed. Third, later in the same text, considering Euro-American societies, Wilson explains that fashion does not need to be functional.[45] People wear clothing that is ill-suited to the climate in various contexts all over the world. Wilson's imagination of

[44] Wilson 1985:14
[45] Wilson 1985:49

'traditional' dress in the 'third world' as static and 'overrun' by colonial relations obstructs her asking other questions.[46]

Recent ethnographic work has "tried to liberate the idea of "fashion" from the theoretical clutches of Western modernity" (Allman 2004:2). Yet, the perception of European 'discovery' of fashion persists and is reproduced through fashion industry narratives and development representations. Studies are beginning to address fashion in Africa in its *haute couture,* or high fashion, elements (van der Plas and Willemsen 1998; Mustafa 2002; Rovine 2004, 2009; Jennings 2013 [2011]; Shaw 2011; Petterson et al 2016;), as well as transformations of street and popular fashions (Mustafa 2001; Rabine 2002; Renne 1995; Perani and Wolf 1999; Rovine 2009). Examinations of high and popular expressions present African fashions as aesthetically diverse, inspired by a wide array of sources, and connected to multiple economic, social and political forces relating to production and consumption. Recent scholarly work has also turned attention to the interesting social life and cultural complexities of *African print* (Littrel 1977, Neilsen 1979, Clark 1991; Mangierie 2008; Sylvanus 2008; Akinwumi 2008; Axelsson and Sylvanus 2010; Axelsson 2012; Young 2016).

Questions and Methodology

As much as possible in this project, I view culture, economy, production, and consumption as interrelated, unified, *and* simultaneous processes; I think relationally about historical development and everyday practices, and I investigate symbolic and material meanings within the same frame. Tracing the threads of *African print* textiles/dress, I aim to question and analyze 'common sense' and common

[46] Some different questions might be asked about Wilson's observation of the prevalence of Western suits in so-called 'third world' countries. For example, 'How did men's suits become popular in specific 'third world' contexts?' 'How has the popularity of suits changed over time?' 'Why and when are men in specific 'third world' contexts choosing fashion over function when it comes to wearing suits?'

representations of 'free market' 'development' in 'Africa', and to challenge myths about 'traditional' dress. In bright and colorful ways, *African print* provides a lens into capitalist development and social change; it illuminates the threads between textiles factories and open-air markets, high-end shops and fashion catwalks, and multinational capital and consumer wardrobes. Ultimately, *African print* expands our analytic view and understandings of neoliberal Africa.

Each moment in historical time requires examination of its own determinate conditions and internal connections (Wise 2003:108). The neoliberal moment in contemporary Africa is not adequately understood by economistic models of 'stages of growth', or grand Marxist, dependency, or neoclassical theories. The world is too complex to fit into 'meta'- and 'master' narratives. More constructive, in my view, is consideration of how and why we choose particular perspectives and frames of reference, what frames make visible or obscure, and what assumptions we choose to test. I assume African contexts have long histories of consuming industrial products and dynamic dress and fashion practices. Using rich historical detail, observations, and analysis, I confirm and disprove these and a range of other assumptions and questions.

I borrow methodological ideas from studies that 'follow the thing' through 'multi-sited' (Marcus 1995, Cook 2004), and 'global ethnography' (Burawoy 1991). Their work suggests ways to follow *African print* through economic processes and cultural formations at 'local' and 'global' levels. The term 'local' emphasizes place-specific conditions, everyday experiences and social relations. 'Global' here is understood as the complex web of connections between localities. As such, the 'global' does not exist *a priori* but emerges as a dimension of linkages between and within multiple local sites (Burawoy 2001; Marcus 1995; Braun 2006). Rather than setting local and global spheres apart, we can see them together in a unified frame of study that identifies and analyses systems, cultures, connections and relationships in

capitalist political economy (Tomich 2004; Agnew 2005).[47] Situating capitalist systems and cultures historically, allows examination of the tangled and transforming threads of local production for global consumption and global production for local consumption.

Employing sources from archives, interviews, and secondary texts, I present arguments in the form of historical narrative. I take from Frederic Jameson (1981) the insight to consider the political as embedded within the social, and the social embedded within the historical. The implications of this insight relate to my study as well as my position as its author – it is obvious but worth stating that the experiences I had during fieldwork and writing this dissertation inform this project. This project emerged in part from the discomfort I felt as a black, female, Sierra Leonean national studying development at historically white universities in the United States where disturbing caricatures of 'Africa' persist. I have observed first-hand how dominant narratives centered on Euro-American 'discovery' silence and skew Other narratives; how they downplay and omit the importance of colonial and imperial violence in Euro-American achievement, and reproduce representations of 'Africa' as outside or behind the modern world. Jacques Depelchin states the problem clearly, "The histories of colonial powers are written as if they had no colonial possessions" (Depelchin 2005:18). In reality, Euro-American discovery, inventions, and development, relate directly to histories of appropriation and exploitation. Narrating imperial and colonial histories along with national challenges, social tensions, and dysfunction in African nations provides a more nuanced historical understanding of the relationality of world and 'African' 'development'. Working towards this end, the present project attempts to address, or 'write/right' (Depelchin 2005), the inherited relations of domination that

[47] See also Agnew 2005; Jackson 1999; Mintz 1985; Tomich 2004; Winslow 2007.

are frequently reproduced in the production of knowledge in African history and social theory.

Guiding Questions

My central research question is: **How is neoliberal development (re)constructing *African print* textiles production, consumption, and cultural dress in Ghana?** Implicit in this question are others about how textiles development was structured before so-called 'free markets', and how textiles consumption and cultural dress relate to national development. This focus generates several other critical questions: to what degree, and in what forms, are 'free market' values and practices present in Ghanaian textiles/dress production and consumption? How are prevailing meanings of *African print* as 'traditional' dress, as a commodity of national interest, and as a feature of global fashion industries, produced and contested? How do women feature as central subjects and objects of consumption? What, if anything, do these contests over the symbolic meanings of *African print* textiles/dress tell us about 'free markets', 'development', the state, multinational companies, or consumer subjectivities?

Why Ghana?

Located on the Gulf of Guinea, the Republic of Ghana shares borders with Togo to the east, Burkina Faso to the north and Cote d'Ivoire to the west. At just over 92,000 square miles and approximately 27 million people, Ghana's regional significance belies its size. As the country most often recognized as the first to gain independence in Africa, Ghana is upheld as a continental leader and beacon of political liberation.[48]

[48] Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Morocco and Tunisia gained independence prior to 1957, however, Ghana is typically recognized as 'sub-Saharan' Africa's first Republic. This terminology exemplifies how 'sub-Sahara' is a racially coded term rather than a geographic referent to an imagined division between 'North' Africa and Africa below the Saharan desert. In reality, the North/Sub-Sahara divide is intended to construct false separations between 'Arab and 'Black' Africa. Imperfections in the 'sub-Saharan'

The nation's first president, Dr. *Osagyefo* Kwame Nkrumah, supported African liberation movements and pan-Africanism across the continent and the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993). Owing to its perception as a political vanguard, its iconic flag and illustrious football team, Ghana is proudly hailed as the Black Star.

Moreover, Ghana's adoption of neoliberal policies and investments in the private sector are recognized by development organizations as a neoliberal success story. Growth rates seemed to support this idea; they rose to 3.1 percent in 2014 before falling to and holding at approximately 1 percent. Additionally, Ghana has experienced several peaceful political transitions from one democratically elected government to another since the year 2000. Relative peace and political stability add to the notion of Ghana as a regional archetype.

Each of the large ethnic groups in Ghana – Akan, Ga Adangme, Mole-Dagbon, and Ewe – has its own language of dress with expressive socio-cultural significance. *African print* dress styles are central to *cloth* communication in Ghana, and are most associated with a three-piece outfit worn by women known as *kaba* and *slit*.[49] This so-called 'traditional' style of dress is made with six yards of *cloth,* and comprised of *kaba* (a fitted blouse), *slit* (an ankle-length skirt), and a multifunctional third piece called a *cover cloth* (which is draped over the shoulder or tied around the waist). The *cover cloth* serves as embellishment or, more functionally, used to secure babies on mothers' backs and free their hands for work. Perhaps owing to this latter use, *African print* in Ghana is also known as *mommy cloth*. While strongly associated with older

construction are immediately evident in the example of Sudan – which, geographically, is east of the Sahara (not North or 'sub'Sahara). Racially, Sudan is majority Arab but is conventionally understood as 'sub-Saharan. The point, however, is not to perfect the term 'Sub-Saharan Africa' but to unveil its intentions and show its contradictions.

[49] Supposedly, *kaba* and *slit* are terms adapted from the English words *kaba* is actually an adapted word for 'cover' and *slit* for 'skirt'. The veracity of this claim might be supported by the existence of similar terms in other former British colonies. In Sierra Leone, for example, a similar term 'kabasloht' is used to describe a dress style worn by Krio women.

women, *African print* is worn by girls, boys, men and women of all ages, ethnicities, and religious groups. The textile is tailored in myriad styles for everyday wear, special occasions, as well as clothing worn to demonstrate solidarity with family members, co-workers, and other institutional affiliates.

As already noted, textiles/dress are generally interesting because clothing is symbolically meaningful in all cultures and societies; it enables creative adornment, connects commodities to socially valued proprieties; and serves as important material in the construction of identity. Dress mediates self-expression and social expectations, it serves as the 'social skin' (Turner 1980). Intimately pressed against the body yet filled with social meaning, clothing is public at the same time as it protects the private and displays personal style. In Ghana, textiles/dress are especially significant, and the choices of clothing worn to funerals, weddings, outdooring ceremonies, and other cultural and social events signal cultural fluency and belonging. For the nation's place in African history and particularly meaningful sartorial practices, Ghana appears as an interesting context to study. I relate to Ghana as a West African, more specifically, as an outsider with cultural and economic privilege. As such, I am vulnerable to oversights, misunderstandings, and misinterpretation. Even as I attempt to understand and write/right history with attention to relations of domination, I am aware that I reproduce others.[50]

Data Collection

Data collection for this project took the form of twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews in Ghana from 2012- 2013, and three years of writing and

[50] Predictably, during fieldwork I faced dilemmas relating to my privilege as a doctoral student affiliated with an internationally recognized university. In addition, I gained trust of market women, fashion-forward women, and retailers by appealing to shared experiences as women. However, the access and respect I gained was countered by challenges relating to language barriers, assumptions of my ignorance because of my age, and difficulties navigating male-dominated spaces (such as factory floors) as a woman.

conducting secondary research of print and online sources, from 2014-2017. Visits to Accra in 2014, 2015, and 2017 allowed additional observation and reconnecting with study participants. In the year of fieldwork, I conducted eighty-six semi-structured interviews with officials at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, representatives of textiles companies, market traders, retailers, tailors, fashion designers and consumer, often in their places of work and homes. [51] My observation was primarily of life in Accra, and the cultures of *African print* at Makola Market, the Accra Mall, fashion shows, and the ateliers of tailors and designers. In addition, I took arranged and unplanned photographs of 'street' fashion; the quick exchanges I had with strangers before asking permission to take their picture revealed a surprising amount of information. Snap shots of strangers told stories in themselves (see Appendix E for photos). Secondary research supplemented oral histories and included library sources, as well as online newspapers, magazines, and blogs.

In the first instance, my analysis is concerned with representations, especially the stereotypes and limited ideas about African consumers in development discourses. Using rich historical detail, I describe a wide array of social processes, relations, and contexts. In addition, my analysis employs slippery theoretical categories such as 'development', 'markets', and 'culture'. In this final section of the chapter, I articulate how I understand these and other terms that guide my research.

Concepts: Definitions and Guiding Ideas

'Development' is the promise of progress, a seductive yet elusive idea. At first mention, 'development' compels us to imagine social order or structure. In my view, 'development' is a social and historical process; a connected set of practices, ideas and processes that vary historically and between contexts. I define 'African development'

[51] I conducted fieldwork primarily in the capital city Accra, and in Cape Coast and Kumasi.

as the range of ideas and projects intended to transform social structures internal or relating to Africa. In line with approaches that view societies relationally, I follow the perspective of 'development' as 'uneven and combined' (Allinson and Anievas 2009; Rosenberg 2010). The concept refuses linearity and epistemological nationalism, and insists on development as an interactive, multilinear processes (Makki 2015). By disavowing notions of the march of 'progress' and acknowledging regional relationality, the concept moves analysis of 'development' forward by explaining differential outcomes as linked through uneven accumulation and concentrations of power across cultural and economic elements (Harvey 1975; Smith 2006).

My thinking about how to accomplish a unified analysis of economy and culture is guided by the notions of 'cultural materialism' and 'commodity cultures'. The idea of **cultural materialism** emphasizes analysis of lived experience as social, historical and material life processes. It builds on Marx's concept of 'historical materialism', the idea that "man *[sic]* makes himself by providing his means of life."[52] As a method, historical materialism implies a double relationship. First, it indicates that human beings reproduce themselves through an intercourse with nature and the *material* world. Second, in engaging with the material world, we inevitably engage with each other in social relationships of production that are dynamic and *historically* varied.[53] Thus, 'historical materialism' provides a grounded method for inquiry into social historical material life; a method that emphasizes the importance of material and social relationships, as well as the dynamism and variability of social life across space and time. 'Cultural materialism' piggybacks on this idea and considers 'culture' to be,

[52] Williams 1977:19

[53] Thus, fishing or agricultural relationships with nature allow communities to reproduce themselves, while also creating particular social relations. In the same vein, capitalist or neoliberal modes of production rely on particular engagement with nature and, in turn, result in particular social relations.

from the beginning, a historically variable material and symbolic process with the same dynamism as 'economy'.

In its insistence on historical material specificity, 'cultural materialism' works against reductionism and the misuse of idealized categories. It emphasizes 'culture' as a productive process, and calls attention to the material *and* symbolic ways groups are marginalized or oppressed.[54] In important ways, 'Africans' continue to be marginalized in 'development' and analysis of the global economy. With attention to inequalities and through close 'textual' reading, 'cultural materialism' strives to uncover processes employed by power structures to reproduce 'hegemonic' values.[55]

'Hegemony' is generally defined as political rule or domination between states and social classes. Gramsci's use of the concept insists on the interlocking of political, social and cultural forces in 'a whole social process' with specific distributions of power and influence. This sense of hegemony emphasizes the ability to identify domination and subordination as they relate to the wholeness of social processes. As Raymond Williams writes:

> "[Hegemony] is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. It is, that is to say, in the strongest sense a 'culture', but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes" (Williams 1977: 110).

The concept of neoliberal or 'market' hegemony enhances our understanding of the 'whole way of life' or 'culture' in which we currently live. 'Market hegemony' suggests that market relations of domination and subordination pervade the whole

[54] Williams 1977; Dollimore and Sinfeld 1994; Parvini 2012.
[55] *African print* is the 'text' analyzed in this project. As a daily practice, we read status, style, belonging and the like on the clothing people wear.

living process – including conscious and unconscious values and beliefs, as well as political, social, economic and cultural activity. 'Market hegemony' is the totality of lived experiences, identities, and relationships shaped by market forces. The term suggests capitalist ideas and activities are so deeply experienced that the pressures and limits they exert appear as normal activities and 'common sense'.

'Neoliberal ideology', in turn, is the formal articulation of a doctrine of a self-regulating market, the concept contributes to but cannot explain the whole of living as 'market hegemony' does. 'Ideology' is a useful ancillary notion to 'hegemony' as it expresses the "formal and articulated system of meanings, values and beliefs."[56] Ideology as an explicit doctrine and conscious system of ideas can be highly influential. Neoliberal ideology is a system of beliefs about the 'free market' and privatization, and a range of consumption ideas (which include possessive individualism, nonstop-upgrading consumer culture, and consumerism). Ideology is both limiting and generative, and its enactment produces specific winners and losers in real life. [57] Williams (1977) suggests that ideologies are "expressed in political, economic, and cultural formations and, to take the full weight of 'constitutive', are internalized and become 'individual wills'."[58] Individual inclinations towards enterprise culture, corporatism, branding, and the 'good life' are all shaped by the contemporary moment of market hegemony.

Of course, the pressures and limits of hegemony change to address alternative and oppositional ideas and practices. Hegemony is complex, it must be continually renewed, and is always resisted. Hegemonic processes work to transform or control alternative and oppositional forms, and to incorporate practices that "are in one way or

[56] Williams 1977:109
[57] The specific beliefs put forward in an ideology are important because they not only place limits on certain behaviors, they also exert pressures towards and away from other activities; they are powerful in a productive Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1980).
[58] Williams 1977:87

another outside or at the edge of the terms of the specific hegemony."[59] Euro-American, corporate market forms and practices are hegemonic; they are constantly incorporating and appropriating other economic and cultural forms and practices. However ubiquitous, they do not govern everything; counter-hegemonic values and practices are always at the edge of hegemony.

Considering 'market hegemony' through the lens of *African print* development requires examination of the ways market forces shape everyday lived experience and relationships, and how markets shape common sense and ideas of progress. By historicizing contemporary textiles/dress markets in Ghana, we can de-naturalize the present and reveal the structure, continuities and ruptures, local hierarchies and global inequalities. We begin to see how 'development' in Ghana is shaped by market ideology, values, and practices, and what this has to do with national, corporate, and consumer contradictions.

'Culture' is a difficult concept in the social sciences, but one that moves us forward analytically. I use several meanings of 'culture' to describe a range of different practices and experiences related to textiles/dress, fashion, and groups of people with shared features and practices. 'Culture' in this project relates to: 1) 'the arts', especially the emphasis on beauty, style, and aesthetics in dress and fashion systems; 2) a 'whole way of life', such as the knowledge and practices of a particular group or locality; and 3.) a social 'system of meanings and values' that change over time. Culture is centrally concerned with meaning. Cultural materialism draws attention to the intertwined historical and material character of economic and aesthetic activity, but inadequately addresses their symbolic meanings. To better explore meaning I find the concept of 'commodity cultures' useful.

[59] Williams 1977:113

'Commodity cultures' suggests that commodities are given different meanings as they are circulated by multinational corporations and consumed in local markets (Miller 1997; Pendergrast 1993). 'Commodity cultures' emerges out of 'commodity chain analysis', which is a conceptual device used to make spatial and social connections across production and consumption of a specified commodity or industry (Crewe, 2001; Hartwick, 1998; 2000: Hughes and Reimer, 2004).[60] The concept of 'commodity cultures' urges critical analysis of the *transforming meanings* of 'things' as well as their circulation through markets and social space. The approach resists blanket disapproval of commodification and commodity fetishism and, instead, "treats commodities as complex cultural forms."[61] While recognizing the influence of powerful forces of production, 'commodity cultures' also acknowledges consumer agency in giving commodities new functions and meanings, in (un)intended ways, in order to build personal and group identities, and to mark distinction and solidarity.[62]

Also constructive is Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) conception of a 'field' as a 'structured space of positions' in which agents and institutions shape practices and meanings.[63] Meanings and values in fields are relational, and established players struggle to maintain dominant meanings as newcomers attempt to redefine norms, conventional practices, aesthetics, and 'taste'.[64] Fields are structured by the power relations and forces that wish to maintain norms and those that wish to modify them.[65]

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[60] Substantial work has been done investigating consumption through commodity chains and networks of value. These include analysis of transnational chains of tourism (Turner and Asch 1975; Urry 1990; Clancy 1998; Morgan and Pritchard 1998), as well as the political economy of food and agricultural products – which is perhaps the best explored 'system' in the literature (Goodman and Redckift 1991; Gardner and Sheppard 1989; Lowe 1992; Ritzer 1993, 1999; McMichael 1992; Friedman 1993; Fine 1998).
[61] Jackson 1999: 99.
[62] Cook and Crang 1996; Leslie and Reimer 1999; Crewe 2001;Bryant and Goodman 2004; Nelson 2006.
[63] Bourdieu 1993:72.
[64] Bourdieu 2005:36.
[65] See Bourdieu 1993 and 2004.

As a methodological tool, the notion of field: "Forces the researcher to ask what people are 'playing at' in the field…what are the stakes, the goods or properties sought and distributed or redistributed, and how they are distributed, what are the instruments or weapons that one needs to have in order to play with some chance of winning, and what is, at each moment in the game, the structure of the distribution of goods, gains and assets" (Bourdieu 2004:34). Capital is unequally distributed in social fields and the structures of the distribution of capital determine the kinds of capital that circulate, accumulate, and establish one's position (Bourdieu 1986:49). The lens of *African print* makes visible people, stakes, strategies, and structures in the fields of the market and dress. Deployment of uneven capital contributes to uneven outcomes within groups in Ghana and across national contexts.

Bourdieu connects the importance of cultural capital to social inequality. As he explains, non-financial assets such as education contribute to fractions and distance between social classes (Bourdieu 1984, 1993). Bourdieu's insights explain divisions within and between social classes from a framework 'outside' relations of production. Importantly, for Bourdieu, *cultural practices,* not objects, are the formative mechanism in determining cultural hierarchies. As such, he argues for analytical categories that are constituted by practices and lived experience (Bourdieu 1984; Slater 1997).

Dress and fashion studies stress the importance of everyday practices and the symbolic power of material culture to serve as *sign-function* (Barthes 1967 [1990]). Accordingly, dress and fashion practices can be studied by examining significant structures and actors in the field, surveying wardrobes, and analyzing "prototypical utterances" (Jobling 2016: 145). Like consumption, fashion and dress foreground women as objects and subjects. Fashion and dress beg broad explanations. As Wilson puts it: "Sometimes fashion is explained in terms of an often over-simplified social

history; sometimes it is explained in psychological terms; sometimes in terms of the economy. Reliance on one theoretical slant can easily lead to simplistic explanations that leave us still unsatisfied" (Wilson 1985: 10). As deeply symbolic cultural phenomena, fashion and dress resist fixed or singular meanings and, instead, insist on plurality, contradictions, and contestations of meaning.

Structure: Chapter Outlines

In this introductory chapter, I have endeavored to sketch the scope of the study. Chapter Two describes *African print* more fully, and explains how it can serve as an illuminating lens into socio-cultural transformation in a new era of capitalist restructuring. Chapter Three considers the emergence of the neoliberal state in Ghana and the implications of market liberalization for *African print* textiles manufacturing. In reviewing transformations of state industrialization and dress projects, *African print* reveals sharp contrasts between the developmentalist moment that followed national independence and the current neoliberal moment. In the contemporary moment, state efforts have turned away from textiles manufacturing and turned towards the informal and entrepreneurial sectors of tailoring and fashion. Tailors and dressmakers in ateliers play an important intermediary link between textiles consumption and *African print* clothing. The dialogic relationship between tailors and consumers becomes an important moment of creative exchange that makes new meanings of *African print* and the national culture project.

Chapter Four shifts the focus from state interventions to the influence of multinational companies in reconstructing *African print* markets. In this neoliberal moment, competition between companies and their related brands has intensified, and produced important transformations in marketing and retail. Competition in *African print* markets is especially fierce between so-called 'Chinese', 'Dutch', and

'Ghanaian' manufacturers that are investing more in the targeting of specific market segments using a diversity of products, marketing, and branding strategies. Branding constructs a sense of local embeddedness, and associates certain characteristics, or a particular identity, with the brand and its consumers. Multinational companies are thus contesting both production and symbolic representations in terms of consumption. However, the proliferation of products and brands camouflages the centralized nature of corporate capitalism in neoliberal markets. I make this point by highlighting how the seemingly different leading brands in Ghana's *African print* markets are owned by the same multinational companies. Branding mystifies social relations of ownership and, beyond the illusion of choice, there is tremendous concentration of capital in neoliberal markets.

Chapter Five takes a closer look at the premium market brand, Vlisco, and examines its adjustments to the new market. Vlisco is manufactured in the Netherlands and known as *Dutch wax* or *Hollandais*. Despite its history of cultural appropriation and exchange, the Vlisco brand represents itself as 'original', 'real', and 'authentic' *African print.* Examination of the brand's history reveals that Vlisco's longevity in *African print* markets is explained by multiple mergers and acquisitions, product adaptations, and other measures to maintain market advantages. Most recently, in response to competitive pressures from goods manufactured in China, Vlisco positioned itself as a fashion house and shifted marketing efforts to take advantage of transformations in 'African' fashion. I argue that Vlisco's efforts to represent itself as a high-end luxury fashion brand hinge on the construction of difference and distance between the brand and its wearers, and inexpensive products, brands, and segments of the market.

Chapter Six follows the thread of fashion. I argue that *African print* fashion is growing in neoliberal markets and, in the process, transforming social meanings and

identities. I argue that *African print* fashion engenders a range of new dress practices and values for consumers, tailors, and members of the fashion industry. *African print* fashion brings semiotic elements to the fore as the dressed black body and the language of dress are 'read' as texts by consumers and experts in the field of fashion. Importantly, *African print* fashion reproduces hierarchies, at the same time as it enables new forms of identification. I point to the cultural production of consumers and tailors/dressmakers as critical in representing and reproducing *African print* as 'fashionable' and 'African', and argue that *African print* dress practices materialize the idea of 'Africa' and generate 'Africa' as an imagined community.

Analytic Strategies and Boundaries

In all, the study sketches the contours of a wide terrain rather than drilling deeply into one or two issues and debates. I work across different theoretical frameworks and schools of thought, moving frequently, at times abruptly, across varying levels of abstraction, perspectives, and experiences that are conventionally analyzed separately. By attempting to connect analysis across a range of literatures and academic disciplines, I forgo opportunities to exhaustively explore questions and debates within any one of these fields.

I do not attempt to create a total picture of the varied elements and transformations of *African print* but, rather, to employ a relational analysis to construct more complex, historicized, and nuanced understandings of 'free markets', 'African development' and 'traditional dress'. My objective is, on the one hand, to examine – through the lens of *African print* – the shift from national developmentalism, industrialization, and the national symbolic to neoliberalism and national consumption projects attached to expanding markets, multinational capital, and consuming subjects. On the other hand, my objective is to examine the

reconfiguration of social life in Ghana in the context of neoliberal globalization and the increased role of brands, shopping malls, and entrepreneurship in remaking the new middle class through subject forming dress and fashion practices.

I hope the approach circumvents the productivism of political economy and economism of some strands of Marxist theory, that it moves past limiting representations of 'Africa', and brings together within one explanatory framework materialist and cultural social relations, and symbolic meaning. I hope to provide an explanatory framework that holds onto more of the 'complexity of human reality' (Grossberg 2010: 16) by making visible neglected social relationships, challenging 'common sense', and creating more capacious understandings of neoliberal capitalist development.

CHAPTER 2

THE LENS OF AFRICAN PRINT

> "Fashion is, after all, about change, and change happens in every culture because human beings are creative and flexible." Eicher 2001:17

Origins: The Provisioning of African Print Textiles

African print textiles are an iconic textile associated with 'African' clothing and culture.[66] The origin of *African print* is linked to Java, present-day Indonesia, where wax-resist dyeing techniques were employed by artisans to make *batik tulis* in the 1800s. After the Dutch colonized Java, Dutch mercantilists and manufacturers developed processes to mechanize wax-resist production, imitate Javanese aesthetics, and create an industrialized version of *batik* known, initially, as *wax print*. Starting in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, *wax print* manufactured in Europe (primarily in the Netherlands, France, and England) was distributed in West Africa by merchants and monopolizing trading firms (namely, the Dutch East Indies Company and United African Company). Today, the same textile, known now as *African print,* is fully incorporated into West African sartorial practices, and serves in a doubly referential capacity as meaningful textile and subject-forming dress.

Textiles have a long history of production and trade in West Africa. Indigenous weaving dates to the First and Second Centuries when raffia, bark, and cotton were used to produce simple fabrics.[67] West African textiles transformed with trade across

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[66] No parallel textile announces 'Europe' or 'North America'. Textiles might proclaim ethnicity or nationality (such as 'Scottish' or 'Austrian'), but no textile announces 'European' continental association.

[67] Ancient Egyptians wore sleeved tunics made from plain linen woven from bark fibers. In fact, the oldest intact garment archaeologists have found in the world is from Egypt's First Dynasty, *c. 3000* BC. (Buckridge 2004: 19) Nubians, their neighbors to the south, were also clothed. In the Ninth Century Igbo weavers, in present-day Nigeria, wove natural fibers into strips of cloth.[67] By the Eleventh and

the Sahara Desert between coastal Africans, Berbers, and Arabs. Textiles trading expanded in the Eighth Century with the spread of Islam across kingdoms in West Africa.[68] By the Fifteenth Century, significant textiles production centers existed in the Senegal basin, inland Niger delta, Hausa kingdoms, and the Bight of Benin. [69] Preferences for textiles dyed with particular colors varied across the West African coast, but demand for indigo and white cottons was greatest. Both colors were produced locally as well as imported. Red wool or cotton cloth was particularly coveted, and silks were valued as highly luxurious. Demand for textiles – as functional, luxury, and status and prestige-conferring items – reflected concern for the time and skill required for production, rarity of fibers, and textile provenance. Textiles were used to cover the naked body, express aesthetics, and as a form of currency.

In what became known as the Gold Coast, among the Akan and Ewe ethnic groups, *kente cloth* was woven from locally grown and dyed cotton, and pieced together for men and women of great wealth and status. [70] First made with black and white yarns, *kente* is now more widely recognized by its bright red, gold, green, and black (cotton, silk, or synthetic) threads woven in harmonious geometric designs. [71] Each strip of *kente* can take a skilled weaver a whole day to complete and, as part of a long tradition, *kente* patterns are named or associated with proverbs.[72] In addition to

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Twelfth Centuries, cotton spinning and weaving were underway in parts of present-day Mali and Niger amongst the Dogon ethnic group (Kriger 2005).

[68] Liedholm 1982.

[69] Kriger 2006:106, 110.

[70] *Kente* is a central feature of royal regalia in Akan traditions, which also include big gold jewelry, appliqué umbrellas, staffs topped with gold statuettes, swords, and royal stools.

[71] Originally *kente* was made using taffeta or local cotton, it is now made with a range of yarns. Many of the brightly colored threads used today are imported into Ghana, but local cotton is also spun and woven in towns like Bonwire, which is considered the home of Akan *kente* cloth.

[72] See Ross et al (1998) for manifold meanings and uses of *kente. Kente* is used widely in Ghana and the African Diaspora. For most of *kente's* history, woven strips were not typically cut or tailored. Ross et al note that when *kente* was popularized internationally in the 1960s it was transformed in ways that

kente, other indigenous textiles forms in Ghana include *Adinkra, Akunitan*, and Nkrawoɔ –stamped, appliqué, and embroidered textiles, respectively.[73] Among the Gonja and Dagomba ethnic groups, *batakari* is woven in strips and pieced together to form a loose-fitting cotton smock called *fugu.*

At the end of the Fifteenth Century, Portuguese merchants established the first European settlement in West Africa in Elmina on the south coast of the so-called 'Gold Coast'.[74] Elmina served as the principal trading post for Portuguese and Dutch ships passing around the Cape of Good Hope and onward to India.[75] In 1637, Dutch imperialists captured Elmina and gradually colonized more areas of the coast. Renaming it the 'Dutch Gold Coast', the region was the Dutch Empire's most valuable trading center in West Africa; it supplied goods to Guan, Edina, Fante and Ga populations on the coast, as well as inland Asante and Akan communities. From Elmina, the Dutch West India Company (VOC) traded slaves, gunpowder and alcohol, while its crew members traded textiles as a lucrative sideline.[76] Merchant diaries and travel accounts recorded particular tastes of different groups in the region, and noted challenges in satisfying consumer demand for high quality goods. For example,

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involved cutting it to create accessories and accent pieces, often for African American consumer markets that used it to claim 'Afrocentric' leanings. In Ghana, fashion influences in the 2000s challenged norms about cutting *kente,* and expanded its use beyond associations with royalty. Increasingly, buyers who can afford the hefty expense of *kente* experiment with it in tailored clothing and accessories.

[73] *Akunitan* means 'cloth of the great'. References and more details

[74] Elmina grew out of the settlement of *Anomansa*, meaning 'endless water supply', which was founded by Kwaa Amankwa. It's believed that during a hunting trip he stumbled on the confluence of the Kakom and Suruwi rivers and turned the abundant water source into a more permanent rest stop. When Portuguese explorers settled there in the Fifteenth Century, they renamed the area 'La Mina', the mine, which morphed over time into 'Edina', later 'Elmina'.

[75] From Elmina, and other ports along the West African coast, textiles, guns, and alcohol were exchanged for gold, ivory, pepper and, eventually, slaves. Elmina's significance in the exchange of people and goods around the world cannot be underestimated. For centuries, tens of thousands of slaves departed Elmina destined for plantations in the western hemisphere.

[76] Textiles flowed in multiple directions. By the Eighteenth Century, textiles produced in West Africa were being traded and transported to various port cities by Dutch, French, English, Swedish and German merchants, or exported to markets in the Gold Coast, the Gabon estuary, Angola, Sao Tomé, and even the West Indies and Brazil.

customers in the region refused "cheap English" copper pots that were not of solid thickness.[77] Through trial and error, from different strongholds along the coast, Dutch, Portuguese, British, and French traders adjusted their inventory to appeal to the preferences of customers in the Gold Coast and other parts of West Africa.

Initially, the textiles imported by European merchants to West Africa consisted of European wool and linen fabrics, as well as brightly colored, light-weight cottons and silks from the coast of Coromonadel in present-day India.[78] From the Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries, cotton textiles from India comprised the majority of textile imports to West Africa, and were among the most traded good in exchange for slaves.[79] The growing demand for printed *Guinea cloth, Manchester cloth,* and *chintz* in West Africa provided a lucrative market for textiles manufacturers in Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, and industrial European textiles eventually replaced more expensive hand-printed *Indian cottons* in West African textiles markets.[80] Industrial textiles were folded into West African sartorial practices and used to inspire new dress styles and textile production techniques. For example, when kept whole, *Manchester cloth* was used by Akan artisans as a base for *Adinkra*

[77] De Marees 1985.
[78] The VOC commissioned textiles producers in Coromonadel to manufacture cloth in styles and colors that reflected African tastes and preferences, with Dutch imperial interests benefiting from the trade. (Gilfoy 1987).
[79] By the end of the Eighteenth Century, England was the world's largest exporter of cotton textiles, increasing imperial accumulation while disrupting older textiles networks in places like Pondichery, India (Kriger 2006: 123). See Steiner (1985) and Washbrook (1997) for more detailed accounts of the British empire's dismantling of textiles manufacturing in India. Customs data for the period between 1699 to 1808 suggest that textiles comprised approximately two-thirds of the value of British exports to Africa (Kriger 2006): 123; see also Clark 2010, and Nielsen 1979. See Kriger 2006 for a detailed history of *Guinea cloth* and the slave trade.
[80] In the Nineteenth Century, *Manchester cloth* captured the textile trade on the coast and replaced the more expensive Indian cottons (Robinson 1969:76); (Nielsen:1979:469) (Washbrook 1997). Also European manufacturers produced calicos and madras in large quantities (Hopkins 1973).

stenciling, and other textiles were unraveled for their dyed yarns and used to weave *kente*.[81]

In the year 1800, Dutch imperialists colonized Java; giving Dutch merchants and manufacturers access to Javanese markets and local products, which included popular *batik* textiles. The Kingdom of the Netherlands extended its imperial and colonial reach across vast trade routes that connected textiles producers and markets around the world. However, in 1830 the Dutch Empire lost the Flanders region in the secession of Belgium. A majority of the Dutch textiles factories were located in Flanders and the loss of industry exacerbated an economic decline in the Kingdom of the Netherlands that had started in the Napolenoic period. Eager to combat unemployment, rebuild industry, and restore the Empire, King Willem I urged the establishment of more textiles factories. In particular, he encouraged industrial production of imitation *batik* for trade in Java, known then as the Dutch East Indies.[82]

The first industrial imitation of *batik* was produced in 1854 by J.B.T. Prévinaire, the Belgian founder and owner of Holland-based mill NV Haarlemshe Katoenmaatschappij (HKM).[83] *Batik* is the Javanese term for a resist-patterning technique in which wax or resin is drawn or stamped on cloth before bathing it in dye. Historically, *batik* was worn by members of royal courts in Java, and patterned with similar motifs in a variety of color palettes. Industrial imitations of *batik,* known as

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[81] Kriger 2006: 124. *Adinkra* patterns are mostly geometric and animal-based symbols that are stamped onto cloth. They are associated with Akan traditions, and produced by artisans on relatively small scale.
[82] At the request of King Willem I, a number of cotton printers attempted to produce imitation Javanese batik, they included the Haarlemsche Katoenmaatschappij, Kralingsche Katoenmaatschappij, Leidsche Katoenmaatschappij, Deventer, and Vlissingen & Co. (Heringa 1989); (Krantz 1989); (Jacobs and Mass 1996).
[83] HKM was founded in 1834 as Prévinaire & Co., and renamed Haarlemsche Katoenmaatschappij (HKM) in 1875. The first machine capable of imitating *batik* was adapted from the French perrotine by J.B.T. Prévinaire; he called his invention *'L*a Javanaise', and began producing *wax print*. As the first wax printing company, HKM was responsible for many of the designs recognized today as *wax print* 'classics' (Arts 2012:24).

wax print, replicate the use of wax or resin in the production of a wide array of differently colored and patterned cotton fabrics. Production of *wax print* starts with the printing of patterns and motifs onto fabric using wax or resin, followed by dyeing of the fabric with a dark base color, often indigo. After the first dye is fixed, the fabric is crumpled and dyed with a second color; crumpling removes much of the wax and allows the second color to seep into previously concealed parts of the cloth. Crumpling techniques create a distinctive and irregular bubbling effect and cracked lines, known as 'craquelé'; the process creates designed 'imperfections' and ensures that no two yards of *wax print* are exactly the same despite repeating patterns.

When King Willem I charged industrialists in the Netherlands to replicate *batik,* the hope was to sell industrial output to consumer markets in Java, however, *wax print* failed to gain popularity in that market. For one, *wax print* was discernably different from *batik,* and Javanese consumers showed preference for the more familiar hand-made textile. Additionally, shortly after the invention of *wax print*, artisans in Java developed new techniques that enabled faster, more precise production of *batik* and, in turn, increased the supply of *batik* to Javanese.[84] Perhaps most importantly, Dutch trade preferences and tariff exemptions diminished when they lost colonial authority of Java to the British in 1872. Consequently, in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, Dutch manufacturers and merchants were in search of new markets for *wax print* textiles, which they found in trading centers on the coast of Africa.[85]

The introduction of *wax print* to West Africa occurred through Elmina, and the textile integrated into West African textiles markets and sartorial practices, first in

[84] At this time, Javanese artisans began using a copper stamp, or *tjap* which significantly decreased the labor time of *batik* printing (Arts 2012:26; Relph and Irwin 2010:14).
[85] An additional challenge was the disinterest of European consumers who apparently found the bright colors and bold motifs of *wax print* unsuitable for their taste and dress aesthetics.

draped and wrapped styles and then as tailored clothing.[86] Several different accounts describe how *wax print* was popularized in West Africa. One account emphasizes the role of Fanti and Asante men who were conscripted by the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army from 1855 to 1872 to suppress resistance in Java.[87] At the end of their service, some soldiers settled in Java and started new families, others returned to Elmina with *batik* and Dutch-manufactured *wax print*. Returning soldiers had inflated confidence and prestige, and the things they carried acquired increased status by association.[88]

Another account of the spread of *wax print* credits Scottish textiles wholesaler Ebenezer Brown Fleming for importing *wax print* to Elmina and distributing it across West Africa. [89] As *wax print* gained popularity, textiles manufacturers in Scotland, England, and France began producing the textile. Dutch manufacturers led the way as European firms supplied *wax print* textiles to West and Central Africa for almost one hundred years. The more *wax print* dressed African bodies and featured in cultural dress practices, the more it was associated with its African consumers.[90] To understand their far-off markets and to increase sales, Dutch manufacturers sent scouts

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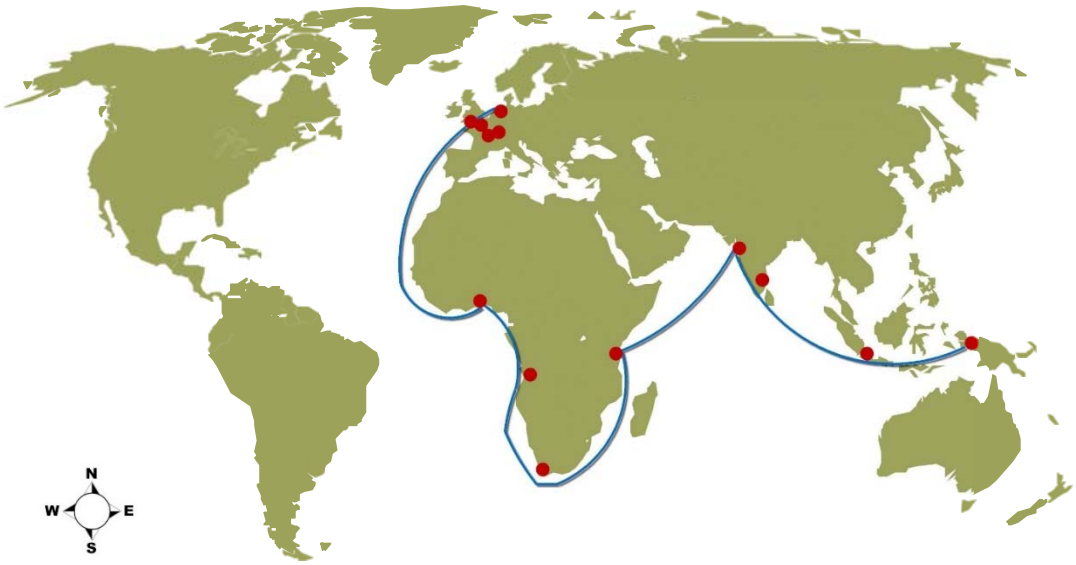
[86] *Lappa,* or its Francophone equivalent *pagne,* refer to the common style of wrapping cloth around one's waist or across the chest and under the armpits, and was among the first popular *wax print* styles.
[87] A cordial relationship between the Asantehene and Dutch Commissioner at the time enabled conscription of Asante fighters to the Dutch army. See accounts of soldiers contributing to the introduction of *wax prints* in: Kroese 1976:202; Osei –Bonsu 2001; Yankah 1995 [citing Spencer (1982)]; Darku 2012.
[88] The social influence of these soldiers is illustrated by the fact that the neighborhood in Elmina in which they resettled became known as 'Java Hill' (Rodenburg 1967:31).
[89] The British took over Elmina in 1872, and textiles producers in Scotland and England enjoyed advantages from access to West African markets through Elmina. As Bickford writes, "Scottish and English textile manufacturers were already imitating Indian cotton textiles like calicos and madras in large quantities (Hopkins 1973). Fleming used HKM designs to commission Javanese-style wax prints in Glasgow, and Manchester soon followed" (Bickford, 1994:9) English *wax print* is no longer manufactured. The last producer of *wax print* in Manchester (the 'ABC' brand) sold operations to ATL in 2005 and is now manufactured in Ghana.
[90] Other printing companies included Deventer Katoen Maatshappij voorheen Ankersmit & Co. (DKM) which produced with the Basel Mission Trading Company (the commercial arm of the Basel Mission Society of Switzerland); FW Ashton (later ABC Wax) factory in Manchester and other members of the Calico Printers Association (CPA).

to West and Central Africa to learn what designs, colors, quality, patterns, and motifs appealed to consumers.[91] Over time, the conversation between European manufacturers, market scouts, traders, and African consumers co-created a distinctively 'African' *print* aesthetic.

Figure 1



Wax print* trade routes, *ca 1885

World War I disrupted European provisioning of textiles to African markets. HKM, which had become the largest textiles company in the Netherlands, was forced into insolvency when blockades on exports were enforced at the tail end of the war. In 1918, HKM's printing rolls and the property rights for its most popular designs were acquired by competing Dutch printing companies Ankersmit and P.F. van Vlissingen & Co. (later Vlisco).

[91] In East Africa, Dutch interests focused on the *kanga,* a multicolored, cotton, printed textile characterized by a central graphic and adage framed by a rectangular, graphic border. See Beck 2005; Boswell 2006; Yahya-Othman 1997; Hadi (2007); Ryan (2013).

Even with the World Wars, manufacturing of *wax print* remained concentrated in Europe.[92] Some suggest that delays in establishing factories in West Africa reflected the desire of British and French colonial governments to maintain African dependency on European goods. It was not until after 1940 that financing was provided to establish *wax print* manufacturing facilities and small industrial projects in the Gold Coast and other colonies in West Africa.[93] Starting in the 1960s, the newly independent state in Ghana sponsored a range of projects that promoted textiles manufacturing (and cultural dress), and positioned textiles as the lynchpin of national industrialization efforts. The *wax print* aesthetic became a symbol of 'African' dress, and an expression of sartorial opposition to European colonialism.

The Many Forms, Names, and Meanings of African Print

In this project, I use *'African print'* as an umbrella term for printed textiles known variably as *wax print, Ankara, Hollandais, Dutch wax, super wax, Java, imitation wax (imi* for short*)* and *fancy wax.* The range of names for different modes of *African print* reflect locations of production, and variations in production techniques and associated degrees of color fastness, design creativity, and brand prestige. Today, *African print* is produced in West Africa (primarily in Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, and Senegal) and in numerous countries in Asia (including India, Pakistan, and China). The Netherlands is the only European country still producing *African print*.

The most important distinguishing feature between various modes of *African print* is whether or not wax-resist was used in their production. When wax-resist

[92] The first textile mill in West Africa was built in Côte d'Ivoire in 1921 by Robert Gonfreville, a former French 'Native Affairs' official (Kilby 1975: 491). However, industrial textile manufacturing remained insignificant in the region for another twenty years.

[93] FIDES (Fonds d'Invessement pour le Développement Economique et Social) and CDW (Colonial Development and Welfare) were created following the Second World War; they provided the needed credit for industrial projects in so-called French and British West Africa.

techniques are used the final product has the distinctive bubbling and lines of craquelé described earlier, and the cloth is, typically, printed on both sides. *Wax print* – including varieties known as *super wax, Dutch wax,* and *Hollandais* – undergoes careful and time-consuming production processes that result in a premium. Consumers who value the aesthetic, craftsmanship, durability, and status associated with expensive *wax print* are invested in purchasing 'authentic' or 'real' *wax print*. The other major type of *African print* textiles are *roller prints,* and include varieties known as *fancy print*, *imi wax,* and *Java. Prints* in this category are made without the use of wax and designs are often printed on one side of cotton fabric. Some *roller prints* attempt to imitate craquelé but, to the discerning eye, their mechanical bubbling and 'imperfections' can be easily distinguished from the visual dynamism and irregularity of '*real wax*'.

Manufacturing of both *wax* and *roller prints* begins with grey baft that is washed, bleached, brushed and stretched. In *wax print* production, carved wood blocks or copper engraved plates are used to apply hot wax in patterns before the cloth is dyed with rotary screen printing. After the first color is introduced, the cloth is dewaxed and other colors applied. In the past, additional colors were added by hand-blocking, but most factories today replicate hand-blocking with machines (See images in Appendix B).[94] Wax printing is typically limited to three colors – one base color and two others. *Roller print* production allows for more color variety and more detailed motifs. In roller printing, a "design is incised onto a series of brass rollers, one for each color to be used. The rollers are then attached to the printing machine one after the next. As the fabric passes under the rollers, dye is applied on a single side in

[94] In the past, *wax print* production included the labor intensive process of hand-blocking, however, as computer-aided design and drafting have become more popular in *roller print* production, manufacturers have ceased using this labor-intensive process. See Appendix B for images of hand-blocking units of a factory no longer in operation.

progression from the lightest to the darkest color" (Bickford 1994:8).[95] Roller printing is considerably faster than wax-resist production as the former allows for simultaneous application of multiple colors on the same design. Once washed and dried, both *wax* and *roller prints* textiles are cut into twelve-yard pieces and bundled for sale, primarily in open-air markets in West Africa. At market, *roller prints* are cut into smaller pieces, as small as one-yard depending on consumer demand, while *wax prints* are 'not cut' and, instead, are retailed in six- or twelve-yard pieces.

What unites the numerous varieties of *wax, roller,* or *African prints,* are their vivid color, geometric designs, printed quality, and repeating motifs. *African print* designs encompass a wide range of symbols, abstract shapes, and seemingly random images such as pineapples, laptops, or fish. These images exhibit cultural and historical influences from India and Java; inspiration from European textiles traditions; symbols, motifs and patterns from African social life and cultural belief systems; as well as iconography and messages commemorating historic and current social events, political figures, and popular ideas.[96] Some of the early *print* designs imitated Javanese and Indian (specifically Hindu) designs and iconography, including the Javanese 'trees of life' and royal *dodot* patterns.[97] Manufacturers expanded *print* iconography to include themes of forage, plants and animals, as well as replications of African symbology, ideography, and homestead items, such as gourds, stools, and

[95] See Bevan and Wengrow (2010) and Bickford (1994) for more detailed description of *wax* and *roller print* production.
[96] Ruth Nielsen presents eight inspirational sources contributing to the design of wax and non-wax varieties of *African prints,* including: Indian cottons, Javanese batiks, European prints, West African indigenous cloth, traditional African objects and symbols, historical events, current events, political figures and ideas, natural forms, and geometric designs (Nielsen,1979:482-484). Cultural practices among different ethnic groups also influenced the colors and patterns of *African print* designs. For example, funerals, outdooring ceremonies, weddings etc. require different color schemes for Akan and Ga people in Ghana.
[97] Allen 2004.

combs.[98] Early *print* patterns drawing from West African influences depicted kola nuts (used for hospitality and communion with ancestors); the golden stool (linked in Akan societies to royalty and power); Adinkra symbols such as *Gye Nyame, Fihankra* and *Nkonsonkonson*, to name a few.

Providing curatorial commentary to a 2004 exhibition of *African print* at the Textile Museum of Canada, Max Allen identifies irony in the imperial history of a *print* pattern known as the 'Sword of Kingship'. Allen writes, the image is:

> "…based on a wrought-iron sword captured by the British from the Asante nation, [and] was subsequently acquired by the British Museum in 1896. The Sword of Kingship pattern has been traced to cloth produced in England in 1904, and made for the African market. This was a remarkable example of imperial bravado – marketing images of a stolen cultural symbol back to the people from whom it was taken" (Allen 2004).

Far from being 'authentically' 'African', *print* textiles designs and production techniques are constituted by 'exchange', 'appropriation', 'customization' and 'hybridity'. In addition, in Ghana, *African print* colors and patterns are meaningful; they mark life events, social standing, age, gender, occupation and more. Funeral colors are especially important, varying from all black or all white, to black and white, black and red, and black and brown textiles depending on the ethnic group, age, and social status of the deceased. Specific colors are expected to feature or not be present at particular social events, and much meaning is made of (in)appropriate attire. For example, wearing dark colored clothing to a celebratory event like a wedding or birthday party might be viewed as an expression of disapproval or dissatisfaction.

At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, as a retailing strategy, market women in the Gold Coast began to endow *African print* designs with names in local languages. Naming *prints* extended or paralleled the well-established practice of naming of hand-woven textiles in the region. While in decline, the practice of naming

[98] Akinwumi 2008:183.

prints continues today. Names vary from proper names to proverbs and popular sayings. As Nina Sylvanus (2007) argues, the naming process indigenizes, authenticates, and popularizes otherwise non-descript foreign textiles.[99] In markets across Accra, *African print* is generally referred to by the Akan word for cloth, *ntoma,* and well-known *prints* with names are referred to collectively as *ntomapa*. Using the industry term, I refer to them here as 'classics'. Many of the 'classics' started as *wax prints* and have circulated in Ghana's markets for a majority of the Twentieth Century. Today, they are produced in *wax* and *roller* varieties by numerous manufacturers, but the Dutch brand Vlisco owns property rights for a majority of 'classic' *African print* designs.

Roller prints with names have a much more recent history (from approximately the seventies to the present) and, occasionally, their names are printed directly onto the cloth.[100] Many of the *roller prints* with names are owned by manufacturers located in Ghana, such as Printex, ATL and GTP. In addition to popular *prints* with names, a segment of *roller prints* imitate *kente cloth*; they replicate the colors and geometric patterns of *kente* at a fraction of the cost, weight, and labor time. At the time of fieldwork, six yards of *roller print kente* sold for as little as $15, in comparison to a full piece of hand-woven *kente* that might measure more than ten feet long and retail from $500 to over $2000. *Roller print kente* is commonly used for curios and keepsakes as well as a range of clothing and accessories in Ghanaian and Diaspora consumer markets. In some respects, *print* replicas of *kente* displace or undercut hand-woven *kente* as representatives of cultural or national pride, but they pale in

[99] See Sylvanus (2007) for a thorough discussion of the local translation accomplished by naming foreign textiles. While Sylvanus investigates *African print* in neighboring Togo, there is a direct parallel to the dynamics of retail in Ghana.

[100] See Darku 2012:45 for distinctions between *ntomapa* and *fancy prints.*

comparison to the grandeur of hand-woven *kente*.[101] Although a majority of consumers can now purchase *African print* with *kente cloth* motifs, printed 'knockoffs' are easily identifiable, and 'real' hand-woven *kente* is still largely purchased by well-off members of society who use it to signal royalty, wealth, and high status.[102]

Roller print varieties of 'classic' patterns are now produced, at times, in violation of intellectual property. Whether *wax* or *roller* printed, legal or illicit, 'classic' *prints* are the most iconic and symbolically meaningful *African print* patterns in Ghana.[103] In Accra, 'classics' are generally named in Ga, Twi, or English; they include the *'Angelina'* print depicted below, *'oba paa' (*good woman*), 'sika wo ntaban' (money has wings), 'asubura' (deep well [of knowledge]); ahene pa nkasa (good beads don't make noise), and Nkrumah's pencil* (See Appendix A). A recent publication by Ofori-Mankata et al (2015) provides an interesting and expansive catalogue of *print* patterns, names, and meanings in Akuapem Twi, and highlights growing interest in the symbolic meanings of *African print* in Ghana.

Angelina is, arguably, the most iconic *African print* pattern. The Dutch manufacturer Vlisco released the pattern in 1962, and market traders gave it the name *Angélina* after the eponymous pop song released in 1966 by Beninois musician Clément Mélomé.[104] *Angelina* is part of Vlisco's 'Java' line of products and the

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[101] The social value of *kente* is evident at festivals in the presence of royals in full regalia; their fingers, arms and neck are heavy with gold and their *kente* cloth seems to sparkle too. In those moments, the symbolism and majesty of handwoven *kente* eclipse *African print,* and printed imitations would be wholly unacceptable alternatives.

[102] *Kente* cloth was originally woven for royal and high status consumers. It is perhaps not so surprising then that today *kente* is most commonly purchased by well-off members of society. Contemporary uses of *kente* for rugs, hats, and other forms that differ significantly from its original intended use provokes ire amongst certain consumers and is the site of impassioned sartorial contestation (See Boateng 2004).

[103] In addition to classic patterns, commemorative patterns which recognize great leaders or significant historical moments.

[104] Vlisco exhibit, Philadelphia Museum of Art, January 2017.

influence of Javanese *dodot* is evident in the central diamond pattern and trident border motifs.[105]

Figure 2

Angelina print

Angelina is used for *dashiki* in Diaspora markets and employed widely in contemporary fashions across West and Central Africa. In the United States, *dashiki* was popularized in the sixties and seventies as a visual symbol of racial identification, resistance to racial suppression, and support for black empowerment and nationalist projects.[106] Black celebrities like Sammy Davis Jr. and Nina Simone, as well as political leaders and activists like Stokely Carmichael and Angela Davis, wore *dashiki* as countercultural expressions that validated and claimed 'Africa', at the same time as they displaced the dominance of Western dress aesthetics. By 1977, "The Famous

[105] The design is of a large central graphic outlined by multi-colored geometric border resembling a row of tridents. The tridents in this design are reminiscent of Javanese *dodot.* This busy center motif is set against a bright monochrome background, usually pink, yellow, green, blue or white.
[106] For a more detailed account of *dashiki* see Joseph (2003) and Lynch and Strauss (2014).

Dashiki" was advertised as "new folklore taking America by storm", and black models dressed in *Angelina print* showcased ways to wear (and be comfortable and chic) in *dashiki* (see Figure 3 below).

Black American appropriation of *dashiki* was coupled with its White American counterpart, the 'hippie look'. Lynch and Strauss (2014) suggest the vibrant colors, loose fit and unisex character of *dashiki* appealed to the 'hippie look' in the sixties and seventies, and was adopted across racially diverse populations and markets.[107] The 'hippie look' extended *Angelina dashiki* from a symbol of Black empowerment to a fashion item for men and women of all races. *Dashiki*'s crossover into White consumer markets is evident in marketing material. For example, in 1969 the well-established crafts sewing company Simplicity published cutting patterns for *dashiki* and 'ethnic' looking tunics. On the first page of the 8177 Simplicity publication, a beach blond White male model wearing a hip-length *dashiki* is pictured alongside a White female model wearing a mini-dress *dashiki*, a headband, and pigtails (see Figure 4 below). The absence of Black models reflects de jure and de facto segregation in the United States at the time, and highlights how *African print* clothing expanded to White markets through the erasure of African and Black bodies. Today, *dashiki* in the United States is worn symbolically to represent Afrocentric leanings and political affiliations, and as expressions (and parodies) of 'Black fashion' or 'hippie' stereotypes. Coupled with big hoop earrings and afros, *Angelina dashiki* recall counterculture aesthetics of the sixties and associated social movements.

[107] Lynch and Strauss 2014:97. My point in distinguishing the 'hippie loo' as representative of appropriation by White Americans is to acknowledge conventional associations of 'hippies' with White populations. In reality, people who claim and are assigned the 'hippie' category come from across racial and ethnic groups.

Figure 3

Old Village Shop advert, 1977[108]

Figure 4

***Simplicity, Sewing pattern #8177,* 1969**[109]

Another 'classic' *African print* pattern resembling Javanese long cloth is known in Ghana as *adukuro mu nsuo;* the pattern uses both *parang rusak,* the broken or double sword, and *kain panjang,* arabesque-looking swords, arranged in alternating diagonals (see Figure 5 below). At the time of fieldwork, a manufacturer in China using the brand name Ourense supplied inexpensive (and presumably illegal) copies of *adukuro*, *Angelina*, and other 'classic' *print* patterns.

[108] https://www.pinterest.com/pin/191825265351936550/
[109] https://www.etsy.com/listing/75573565/1960s-dashiki-shirt-pattern-bust-36

Figure 5

Adukoro print and Java Influences

Left to right: Javanese 'parang rusak', Javanese 'kain panjang', and African print 'adukuro mu nsuo'

The names given to 'classic' *prints* make them more marketable, and imbue an industrial material with local meaning. For example, a *print* named ɔ*tanhumu yɜya,* meaning 'false hatred is damaging' or 'unnecessary hatred causes pain', references the unfortunate tendency of women to be hostile to one another without just cause. As an elderly woman wearing the *print* explained to me:

> "It's when I haven't done anything to you, yet when you see me you hate me. And it's very common in our culture. The first time a woman looks at you, she hates you…What have I done to you that you hate me? Just because maybe I said something, or something that I did, something I don't even know. So if I know there is something like this between us, when I'm going where I know I'll meet you, I'll wear that cloth named ɔ*tanhumu yɜya,* just to communicate quietly that 'hey, what you're doing is not fine'."

Yet another 'classic' *print* that exchanges messages between women is *mehunyefecha mekra,* 'I am more beautiful than my rival'. The name refers to rivalries between women who are married to, or mutually interested in, the same man. When worn strategically, *mehunyefecha mekra* can quietly goad or intimidate one's rival.

However, meanings can be lost in translation and sent when unintended, not every sign is read correctly. Also, as the volume of *roller prints* increases, the practice

of naming *prints* has declined. Traders no longer need to name *prints* to move product, and inexpensive *prints* do not appear worth the effort, or cultural capital, required to link them to proverbial sayings to products. In some respects, a kind of indistinguishable plebian culture has emerged with the circulation of inexpensive *African print* products. Instead of naming individual *roller print* patterns, traders at Makola Market are increasingly reliant on the names of 'types' of *prints* with shared characteristics – 'funeral cloth', 'big cloth', 'small cloth' etc. At the time of fieldwork, an especially popular type of *print* was 'Obama cloth', which referred to fabric with shiny gold finishing and accents, and was named after then President of the United States. For perhaps obvious reasons, market women are among the most knowledgeable people about the names of *African prints.* Women across other professions, in approximately their fifties and older, are the most knowledgeable group of consumers. Often younger men and women interviewed knew very few names of 'classic' *prints*, and many stated that their "mothers would know."

Although the practice of naming *African print* patterns is an important commercial and cultural practice in Ghana, it is not one found across West Africa. The most important shared experience in the region in relation to *African print* is the practice of consumers taking textiles to tailors who produce custom-fit clothing. I use the term 'tailor' as a gender-neutral reference that includes people who may also identify as dressmakers and seamstresses. Tailors across West Africa vary dramatically in training and the formality of their labor, yet their services provide a critical link in the transformation of textiles to clothing and a certain 'culture of creativity' in West Africa.

If not for tailoring and dress practices in West and Central Africa, *African print* would not have its largest market. Artisanal tailoring is a form of creative expression

that adds value to textiles, and enables a whole world of social stratification and symbolic messaging;. I use the construction 'textiles/dress' to signify the interdependence and mutually constituting cultures and markets of textiles and dress. *African print* is the most commonly used textile in the language of dress across West and Central Africa. Tailoring infrastructure varies from one country to another, as do *African print* vernaculars.

In Nigeria, *African print* is known as *Ankara* and has been manufactured locally since the 1960s.[110] For decades Nigerian consumers considered *Ankara* mundane and excessively accessible.[111] However, a wave of interest in fashion industries in Africa and world fashion cities in the early 2000s increased interest in *Ankara* in the early 2000s and turned the textile into a popular item for fashion-forward clothing and accessories. In Togo, *African print* is referred to as *pagne* or *wax Hollandais,* and, because Lomé has been a so-called 'free port' since 1968, mass volumes of *prints* are imported primarily from Holland, China, and neighboring West African countries. From the 1950s to early eighties, when *wax Hollandais* was an expensive import, business women and traders made a fortune selling the textile and became amongst the wealthiest, most influential social and political constituency in Togo. Colloquially called *Nana- or Mama-Benz* because of their reputation for purchasing luxury German vehicle Mercedes Benz, these women have been the focal point of considerable (scholarly) attention.[112]

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[110] It is unclear where the name *Ankara* comes from. One possibility is that Ankara, Turkey, was a trading center for *wax print,* or a similar looking textile. Another link might be 'Turkey Red', which was a dyeing process imported to England, the Netherlands, and France from Turkey and India in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. The 'Turkey Red' process resulted in a vibrant red color, and was used on cotton textiles exported from Europe to African markets (Parks 1928). More research is needed to determine origins of the name *Ankara* in reference to *African print* in Nigeria.

[111] Especially in contrast to expensive lace and jacquard imports from Switzerland and Austria.

[112] See Junger 2002. Reflets Sud: Le Tissu Pagne, Documentary; Khor 2009. In the seventies, Nana-Benz were so wealthy that they hired out their Benzes to the resource-strapped Togolese government for use at state functions and visits by foreign dignitaries. Their rags-to-riches story is praised by some

Market women in Ghana have not achieved the same political influence as the *African print* traders in Togo. Perhaps because the state in Ghana initially invested in manufacturing *African print* and regulating trade; the power of market women has been checked periodically by the state in order to bolster production in local factories. In relation to investments made by the Ghanaian state, multinational brands, market traders, consumers, and tailors, *African print* has developed sundry meanings in its role in industrial and commercial projects, and as symbolically meaningful clothing. In the final section of this chapter, I examine the significance of using *African print* for 'cultural' dress and fashion.

Material and Symbolic Structure of Dress

As Terence Turner notes, dress is the social skin (Turner 1980); it is material linking the private and the public, the body and the social being. Elizabeth Wilson explains that, "In all societies the body is 'dressed', and everywhere dress and adornment play symbolic, communicative and aesthetic roles"[113] Dress is a changing system entangled in production, distribution, and consumption; cultural taste and personal style; social expectations; and fashion aesthetics and politics.

For hundreds of years, people in West Africa have used textiles, beads, bracelets, body painting, scarification, and piercings to dress and adorn the body. [114] With the spread of Islam in the Tenth Century, turbans, shirts, shoes, robes, and veils were added to indigenous dress forms.[115] The 'civilizing' projects of Christian

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as a journey of "personal freedom" (Press 1996:296), and critiqued by others for their extravagance and the complicated racial and sexual politics of their engagement with Dutch textiles vendors (Kohr 2009:168).

[113] Wilson 1985:3

[114] Various African communities used animal hides, sisal, beads, jewelry, wire and woven textiles as forms of dress (Martin 1994; Fisher 1984).

[115] Ibn Battuta's travel accounts from the Fourteenth Century confirm that textiles were traded across West Africa, the Sahara and other parts of the Islamic world.

missionaries expanded European dress influences.[116] In the 1800s, mission schools donated clothing and taught 'plain needlework' in 'home economics'; European dress styles expanded through the church, schools, and amongst Africans working in European domestic spaces.[117] By the beginning of the Twentieth Century, Christian and colonial dress practices had "imposed new standards of appearance", diminished the status of indigenous dress, and reduced the numbers of people trained in local dressmaking techniques.[118]

At the same time, colonial impressions of African nudity gave credence to ideas of cultural difference, read as 'backwardness' and black inferiority. Allman (2004) argues that: "In the early years of colonial rule, cloth served…as a means for comparing levels of civilization among the colonized, and then as a colonial index by which to measure the march toward civilization of the "wild" and "naked tribes"."[119] Colonial antinomies placed 'native' or 'traditional' cultures against the 'modern' and 'civilized', and Enlightenment representations placed Europe and Africa on opposite ends of the 'chain of being' (Ferguson 2006). Rather than viewing 'Europe' and 'Africa' in relation to each other, they were conceived – in terms of dress –as

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[116] See here Allman 2004; Burke 1996; Perani and Wolff, 1999; Wass 2002 for influences of Christianity and Islam on West African dress forms. Europe's influence on African dress was magnified by civilizing missions, colonial rule and capitalist expansion (Comroff and Comaroff, 1997; Hendrickson, 1996; and James, 1996). Coastal Africans wore European clothing to signal conversion to Christianity, acquisition of European education, high status, and urban affiliations, however these meanings faded as European styles became more popular across classes and religious groups. See Schneider (1987) for the significance of European missionaries to clothing cultures in Africa.

[117] See McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh (1975:40) for account of mission education. By requiring children in mission schools to wear Western-style uniforms, missionaries visibly altered dress practices, and introduced Euro-Christian norms of dress. Also, Africans working as domestic servants in European households had intimate access to European clothes and fashions. Domestic workers received second-hand castoffs as well as uniforms and hats (including the fez, a favorite of Europeans for their 'help'). Contention over what Africans wore during colonial times grew as Africans began experimenting with European fashions. In Francophone colonies effort was made to dress as much like Europeans as possible as "this was the mark of an évolué" (Martin 1994: 408).

[118] Schneider 1987:434.

[119] Allman, 2004: 147

unconnected cultures represented, respectively, as 'modern/civilized/advanced' and 'traditional /uncivilized/backwards'.

Reified ideas about 'traditional', 'tribal', 'African' dress (or lack thereof) were deployed in the establishment of imperial hierarchies and colonial common sense about cultural difference. Dress categories took on new reified forms as independence movements and nationalist projects claimed and constructed 'authentic' varieties of 'national' dress. Nationalist dress projects romanticized and essentialized cultural identity in order to represent the nation as united and, through expressions of cultural independence, symbolically and materially undermine Europe's imperial domination.

One of the most significant efforts in challenging essentialized meanings of 'African' and 'European' dress is found in the work of British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare, MBE. Shonibare's treatment of *African print* challenges notions of cultural purity and assimilation, and explores contradictions of colonialism, identity, and belonging in complex and reflexive ways. Popularized in the 1990s and displayed in museums and art galleries, Shonibare's most famous pieces are sculpted figurines dressed in Victorian-style clothing made from *African print* textiles*;* the detailed artistry of his pieces, their irreverent poses, and the unexpectedness of *African print* in conventionally British settings provoke consternation.[120] In other pieces, Shonibare uses *African print* as sails of imperial ships, ballet shoes, tutus, space suits, and the skin of families of aliens. He intentionally uses *Dutch wax* purchased in Europe for his installations in order to challenge notions of the 'exotic' or 'authentically' 'African'. By reversing conventional dress expectations in witty and incisively critical ways,

[120] Many of Shonibare's Victorian-looking pieces comment on imperial wealth, power and leisure, and in so doing inspire reflection about wealthy Africans.

Shonibare demonstrates the potential of clothing to construct, and disrupt, predetermined meanings of culture and identity.[121]

In contemporary Ghana, differences in dress continue to be crystallized by terms like 'Western', 'cultural', 'authentic', 'tribal' and 'traditional' in ways that obscure the hybridity and contingency of dress practices as well as the way dress is deployed to mark social cohesion and boundaries.[122] A critical approach to dress categories recognizes that there are no inherent or unchanging ancient dress practices, and meanings that constitute 'African', 'Ghanaian', Ga, Akan, and other 'cultural' dress. [123] Considering its many meanings, *African print* dress might be described as 'cultural', 'national', 'tribal', 'ethnic', or 'African'. Rather, than give these dress categories inherent meaning, we can view them as discursively produced and materialized, enacted, felt, and performed in everyday rituals and special events.

The body, highly regulated by clothing, is also made more intelligible. In many social settings, clothing is required and its absence creates social discomfort and sanctions. Daily self and social regulation governs how much, and what parts, of the body are covered by clothing, and choices about 'what to wear' reflect conscious consideration, financial constraints, taste, and style. What is 'appropriate' attire shifts with context and individual and social notions of fashion and style.

'Western' dress is the most widely worn form of everyday clothing in Ghana. Jeans, dresses, pants, skirts, suits, t-shirts and the like are the norm in both rural and urban settings. Some of this clothing – expensive, designer, or discounted – is freshly

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[121] Kent 2008:12

[122] See Firstenberg, 2000.

[123] The literature on African dress (especially Schneider, 1987; Eicher (ed), 1995; Perani and Wolff, 1999; Durham, 1999; Allman, 2004; Hansen, 2004; and Boswell 2006) disputes the staunchly entrenched notion that African dress is timeless and locally circumscribed.

retailed, but a majority is second-hand. Upwards of 80 percent of Ghana's population is estimated to purchase second-hand clothing (Baden and Barber, 2005). While consumers of second-hand clothing cut across income segments, used clothing is the mainstay of the poor, subsistence workers, and the lower middle classes. In Makola market, second-hand clothing is piled high in heaps on the sidewalks referred to as 'bend-down boutiques'. Vendors stand next to their wares holding samples up to their chests and showcasing items to shoppers walking by. At the time of fieldwork, used clothing retailed for as little as 3 GHS (approximately $1 USD), and varied dramatically in quality and regulatory inspection.[124]

Known as 'folks', selections', and '*obroni wa wo*' – which, literally means a 'white person has died' and is translated loosely to mean 'dead white people's clothes' – the second-hand clothing trade is perceived by many as a menacing threat to 'traditional' dress. Fashion cast-offs from charity organizations especially in the UK, Germany, US, and Japan, create uncompetitive prices for garment manufactures in Ghana. The £50million-a-year industry sources from charitable donations in -hand clothing trade in the West African nation, much of which is dependent on unsold garments from British charity outlets, has led to the country becoming a "dumping ground", according to Ghanaian cultural experts and clothing industry bosses.[125]

In Ghana, new and second-hand 'Western' clothing circulates alongside a range of textiles used to make 'traditional' dress.[126] 'Traditional' dress is used

[124] At the time of fieldwork, there existed a ban on importing second-hand intimate clothing, such as bras, underwear and boxers, but this ban was flagrantly disregarded. Economic necessity appeared to be a principal reason for the popularity of second-hand clothing generally. Amongst small pockets of affluent consumers second-hand clothing appeared as an alternative to other retail options. However, obtaining new goods from retail outlets is not as popular as custom-ordering clothing from neighborhood tailors or purchasing second-hand clothing.

[125] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/ghana-s-national-costume-has-been-crowded-out-by-primark-cast-offs-say-cultural-experts-9601385.html

[126] 'Traditional' dress in Ghana is fabricated with textiles from three general textiles categories: indigenous textiles (i.e. *kente*, *Adinkra, batakari),* industrial imitations of indigenous textiles, and other

colloquially as a portmanteau for dress produced with a variety of hand-woven *kente* and *batakari,* hand-stamped *Adinkra,* and industrial textiles such as brocade, bazin, damask, linen, lace and *African print.* 'Traditional' dress styles can be draped, wrapped, and tailored. What makes disparate textiles and dress styles cohere as 'traditional' is their perceived difference from 'Western' dress aesthetics, and perceived connections to local, ethnic, and indigenous dress practices.

During fieldwork, people used the term 'traditional' to describe wide-sleeved *kaftan* made from *bazin* and embellished with intricate embroidery around the neckline. 'Traditional' was applied to describe the men's style consisting of an inner tunic, loose shorts or ankle-length pants, a billowing outer gown, and matching cap known in Hausa as *babaan riga* and as *agbada* in Dagomba. *African print* was called 'traditional' when used for the draped and wrapped style of *ofra ntoma,* and carefully tailored *kaba* and *slit. Ofra ntoma,* translates to 'man's *cloth'* in Twi; it is a style for men that is comprised of a single piece of cloth wrapped around the trunk of the body, under one arm, and over the opposite shoulder. While the style is overflowing with fabric, it is designed to expose a portion of the wearer's chest as well as the shoulder and length of one arm. In its lavish renderings, *ofra ntoma* is fashioned with twelve yards of luxurious fabric that must be held up and frequently readjustment. [127] It is a grand style full of strength and pageantry. Modest takes on *ofra ntoma* also exist, especially among people with modest incomes. Across classes *ofra ntoma* is the common 'traditional' style worn to funerals. Additionally, it features centrally at festivals, social functions, weddings and other special occasions.[128]

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industrial textiles (i.e. lace, linen, damask*, African print*). Across West Africa, other popular styles - *boubou, ero* and *bouba,* and other 'traditional' dress forms are produced with industrial textiles.

[127] *Ofra ntoma* is most associated with kente and royalty or high status individuals. While it is worn with *African print,* there is more value placed on wearing this style with *kente* or *Adinkra.*

[128] It is common to see men holding up their *ntoma,* ensuring that it does not drag or fall off their shoulders; *ofra ntoma* is not practical or functional for manual labor.

Raymond Williams' (1977) notion of dominant, residual and emergent forms is helpful in analyzing 'traditional' dress in Ghana, as it allows appreciation of *African print* as a dominant 'tradition' that incorporates residual dress forms and meanings from the past. In reality, what is framed as 'traditional' dress is what Williams describes as a *"selective tradition*: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification."[129] Ideology and hegemonic pressures shape common sense understandings of 'traditional' dress in ways that include, and promote, *African print* as 'traditional' dress, over and above other textiles and styles, such as *batakari* and *fugu*. Traditions are selected from a range of practices from "the significant past", and selection of a particular dress tradition is an expression of dominance over other forms.[130]

Presumably because of local manufacturing projects and large volumes of imports, *African print* is the dominant 'traditional' textile in Ghana if measured by popularity and also *print's* appropriation of *kente* patterns and *Adinkra* symbols. At the same time, *African print* is deployed as an alternative to historically dominant Western dress forms; it is used as sartorial resistance to Euro-American norms, and to express positive feelings and associations with 'black', 'Africa'. Complicating the idea of *African print* as 'traditional' and in opposition to 'Western' dress, is the fact that increasingly, *African print* is being used to tailor a range of 'Western' styles and products: A-line dresses, button-down shirts, maxi and miniskirts etc.

Typically, consumers purchase *print* textiles for themselves or family members then work with tailors to design custom-fit clothing. From a design perspective, *African print* is a cultural art form; it encourages creativity, unleashes imagination,

[129] Williams 1977:115.
[130] Ibid.

and enables expression of subjectivity. Consumers engage in the creative process to varying degrees; some sketch, design, or describe desired features; others select styles worn by models in posters, 'look books', and magazines; still others take samples they want replicated to tailors. Tailoring is the critical link in West Africa between textiles consumption and quotidian dress cultures, especially for the middle and upper classes.

In recent years, textiles companies and apparel production firms moved towards supplying ready-to-wear, or prêt-à-porter, *African print* products. The future of this strategy is uncertain as consumers continue to demand custom-made clothing. The majority of *African print* apparel in Ghana is still produced by tailors and makeshift ateliers and businesses of varied sizes that co-design clothing with consumers.

Conclusion

Starting in the early 2000s, *African print* fashion gained new momentum. Fashion expresses social conventions as well as individualized creative expressions of an embodied worldview. Fashion systems are based on sensorial value judgments of 'taste' and a discerning 'eye'. As such, fashion produces social exclusion and ranking, and draws boundaries between who is 'in' and who is 'out'. *African print* fashion was transformed with liberalization in the 1980s. As inexpensive imports flooded the market, consumers, crafts producers, and designers experimented with *African print* products and fashions – in addition to new clothing styles *African print* hats, bowties, clutches, sneakers and the like entered production. Established fashion players and new-comers described *African print* products as 'trendy', 'Afro-chic', 'modern Africa', 'Afrocentric' and 'Afropolitan'.[131] *African print* boosts Ghana's expanding

[131] What it means for Ghanaian consumers to be 'Afrocentric' is an interesting and currently unexplored question.

fashion industry, which employs a range of people with 'artistic' abilities such as clothing designers, hairdressers, makeup artists, stylists and photographers, as well as crafts producers such as cobblers and milliners.

Also, recently, *African print* clothing has been featured in the collections of international fashion houses like Burberry and Yves Saint Laurent as well as in more popular brands like Aldo and Urban Outfitters. *African print* was celebrated in international fashion spreads as the new exotic 'it' thing, a role it plays periodically for Euro-American artists and tastemakers looking for inspiration. In the international fashion industry, African fashion was only recently acknowledged as on par with designers showing in Paris, Milan, London and New York.

The key feature of fashion is the rapid, recurring changing of styles. The lens of *African print* illuminates how West African textiles and dress styles have changed over the longue durée as well as the more recent post-colonial and neoliberal past. *African print* allows us to address the legacy of colonial antinomies that sought to subordinate and suspend 'African culture'. The shortcoming of inherited common sense about fashion, as Niessen describes it, is that too often it reproduces a "great divide between the studies of Western fashion/clothing processes and the universal phenomenon of dress/adornment… As a result, global dress events of profound implication for fashion theory are kept either hidden or barred from scrutiny" (Niessen 2003: 250). Research on *African print* holds the possibility of not only illuminating dynamics and processes relating to African history and development, but also potentially expanding understandings in fashion theory. This chapter has explored the lens of *African print,* and the next chapter examines the specific national context of Ghana and the implications of neoliberal policies and projects for *African print* textiles/dress.

CHAPTER 3

STATE TEXTILES/DRESS PROJECTS: FROM DEVELOPMENTALISM TO NEOLIBERALISM

Developmentalism: Modernizing Projects and the Post-colonial State

In the middle of the Twentieth Century, *African print* manufacturing was viewed in Ghana as a way to delink economically and culturally from Europe by creating industrial jobs and promoting non-European dress traditions. Contemporary neoliberal policies contribute to the deindustrialization of textiles production in Ghana at the same time as they promote employment in the informal economy of tailoring and the unpredictability of fashion entrepreneurship. From the postcolonial moment to the present, national textiles projects have moved away from explicit investments in industrialization to concern with dress practices in ways that transform *African print's* social uses and national meanings. I argue that neoliberal projects and policies in Ghana contribute to the deindustrialization of textiles on the one hand and increased consumption of 'cheap' textiles imports on the other. The ubiquity of *African print* imports facilitates the expansion of local apparel crafts industry and atelier culture, which also meets demand for 'traditional' dress and new 'African' fashion. The dialogic relationship between tailors in ateliers and textiles consumers becomes an important moment of creative and commercial exchange that (re)articulates *African print* and the national development project.

When Ghana gained independence in 1957, industrial manufacturing was limited, representing less than 1 percent of national output. [132] President Kwame Nkrumah introduced industrialization policies that, to this day, comprise the most significant set of industrialization policies in Ghana. Pursuing the logic of import-substitution-industrialization, Nkrumah's Seven Year Plan identified three main industrial sectors as priorities: 1.) manufacturing clothing, footwear and soap; 2.) processing, canning and packaging foods; and 3.) processing of agricultural products and mineral resources.[133]

Accordingly, state-supported textiles enterprises were established, industrial infrastructure expanded, technology and capital inputs were imported, and factory labor employed. [134] In addition, the state introduced protective subsidies and tariffs to protect fledgling industrial firms. Textiles factories were established in the towns of Juapong and Akosombo in the Volta region, and in Tema, the industrial suburb on the outskirts of Accra.[135] *African print* comprised the majority of local textiles production and, in order to limit competition, the government imposed restrictions on *wax print* imports from Europe in 1961.[136]

The dream of an industrialized nation loomed large in national-modernist imagination, as did the idea of an economically independent Ghana. Nkrumah's

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[132] Kilby 1975:475. Colonial policies in the Gold Coast promoted 'free' trade of industrially manufactured textiles without encouraging local production of the same. In 1947, the Gold Coast Industrial Act was made, however, the act took very little substantial action towards industrialization. It wasn't until the Development Plan of 1951 that substantive attempts were made to introduce industrial production in the Gold Coast, see Ewusi 1986 and Donkor 1997.
[133]Ewusi 1986: 33.
[134] Textiles manufacturers in Ghana depend on imported raw materials, factory equipment, grey baft, dyes, chemicals, and zippers, among other inputs.
[135] Juapong Textiles Limited, later known as Volta Star Textiles Limited, was established in 1968 in Juapong, and Akosombo Textiles Limited in Akosombo the year prior. Other established manufacturers included Tema Textiles Limited, Ghana Textiles Printing Company Limited, Ghana Textiles Manufacturing Company, Freedom Textiles Industries Limited, Spintex Ghana Limited, Ghana Blanket Factory, Ghana Cotton Company, and Kumasi Jute Factory.
[136] Littrell 1977:6.

government sponsored hundreds of manufacturing factories across various sectors.[137] While he declared Ghana "non-aligned" status in the Cold War conflicts that were structuring global politics, by 1960 Ghana's economic programs leaned towards socialism.[138] 'African socialism', as he called it, decried neocolonialism and criticized Ghanaian consumption of foreign goods. As he put it: "Every time we import goods that we could manufacture we are continuing our economic dependence and delaying our industrial growth."[139] Investments made by Chinese, Dutch, Indian, and Lebanese interests worked within the state's vision to establish and manage local *African print* factories. As *African print* was woven into import substitution industrialization policies, it was simultaneously linked to the narrative of national culture and progress.[140] Citizens were encouraged to purchase locally produced *African print* as an act of patriotism and symbol of industrial independence from Europe.[141]

The colonial period had expanded and normalized 'Western' dress and, starting in the 1940s, nationalist agitation in the Gold Coast promoted a return to *kaba* and *slit,* and other 'traditional' dress styles.[142] As more African countries gained independence in the 1960s, nationalist and black power movements shared in the aesthetics of Ghana's dress styles. Kwame Nkrumah put *kente cloth* (and to a lesser extent the

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[137] Lall et al (1994) suggest Ghana's formal manufacturing sector can be separated into three basic groups: 1.) a small number of large firms capable of producing textiles at international standards; 2.) more numerous small and medium sized firms with relatively current technology but low efficiency; and 3.) "numerous informal or micro enterprises with very simple or traditional technologies, serving limited local markets and lacking standardization, quality control and modern management techniques" (Lall et al 1994:28).

[138] In reference to Ghana's non-alliance, Nkrumah famously declared, "We face neither East nor West, we face forward." This maxim was played out in his administration's borrowing which, ironically, made Ghana more dependence on European and North American countries.

[139] Anin 1991: 144

[140] Ross 1998:166

[141] In addition to *African print*, textiles manufacturers produced household fabrics, including: curtain materials, beddings, towels, and kitchen napkins. Industrial textiles exports consisted primarily of crafted handbags, men and women's casual wear, bed sheets, cushions, curtains and toys. (Quartey 2006:137)

[142] See Gott 2009:152-155

northern smock style of *fugu)* on the world stage, and turned ethnic textiles into national and Pan-African symbols of freedom and independence.[143] Photographs, statues and stamps, as well as the popular 1953 Time Magazine cover, depicted Kwame Nkrumah draped in *kente* cloth and, in celebrating his efforts towards decolonization, made positive associations with the clothes he wore.[144] Although Nkrumah was ethnically Nzema and *kente cloth* emerged from production centers in Asante and Ewe regions, his choice to wear *kente* at formal state events and significant occasions strategically nationalized the textile. The message of citizenship suggested that dress cultures were no longer symbolic of regions but of the nation, and that the disparate ethnicities under Ghana's flag could all claim and contribute to a shared culture.[145] Textiles and dress were strategically deployed in the symbolic project of nation building, and used to fold different ethnic identities into one national fabric.

Despite massive state investments and protections under Nkrumah's administration, textiles manufacturers in Ghana struggled to keep up with local demand. Production was limited by import restrictions on raw materials, and the availability of intermediate goods and spare parts. Factories operated below capacity and local textiles products were priced above the cost of comparable imports.[146] As world textiles manufacturing centers moved to China, India and Korea, cheaper varieties of *African print* were beginning to circulate.

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[143] See Spencer, 1999. Importantly, Nkrumah and other members of the Big Six wore *fugu* on the day they declared Ghana independent from British rule.

[144] Nkrumah's promotion of 'national' dress does not suggest national cohesion or support. Allman (2004) describes nationalist campaigns in the 1950s against nudity in the north of Ghana. Political rhetoric about nudity rallied around the themes of national unity, Ghana's role as a Pan-African leader, and regional struggles (between the north and south). According to Allman, politicians from the south imposed their conceptions of "Ghanaian costume" onto northern communities. Ironically, Allman notes, the clothes distributed to Ghanaians in the north were mostly comprised of second-hand donations from Europe and North America (Allman 2004:157).

[145] Hess 2006.

[146] Kilby 1975; Killick 1978; Quartey 2006; de Valk 1996.

As Dowse (1969) put it, textile manufacturing in Ghana was replete with "signs of obvious industrial and commercial mismanagement", a situation worsened by economic policies that limited the availability of foreign exchange.[147] Moreover, spending in Nkrumah's government had grown from £13 million to £71 million in nine years with only modest GDP growth. The internal government debt increased from £39 million in 1960 to £204 million in 1965.[148] Nkrumah's government authorized over 600 state-operated or state-subsidized manufacturing projects to produce lightly-processed food items, beverages, tobacco, textiles, garments and footwear, wood and paper, plastics and a variety of metal products. Factories were often established without feasibility studies and their construction relied on foreign loans and credit from Ghana's central bank; many proved unprofitable and drained rather than supplemented government savings.[149] Ironically, as Nkrumah expressed desires to see African nations free themselves from neocolonial domination, he deepened Ghana's indebtedness to foreign powers, primarily the U.K., the U.S.A., and the U.S.S.R.[150] Nkrumah's borrowing policies exacerbated political instability in Ghana as debt repayments undermined the modest gains made from local manufacturing.

In 1966, Nkrumah was ousted from power in the first of a streak of coup d'états in Ghana from that year to 1981. For decades, Ghana was gripped by political turmoil and instability in the form of short-lived military and civilian regimes.[151]

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[147] Dowse 1969:96.
[148] Berg 1971:200.
[149] Borrowing from Ghana's Central Bank essentially meant printing more currency which increased inflation.
[150] Nkrumah took loans from Moscow and Washington and was, consequently, distrusted by both sides.
[151] In the seventies military regimes under General Acheampong's leadership and General Fred Akuffo maintained a bloated state bureaucracy characterized by corruption, inefficient patterns of patronage, nepotism and sycophantic political behavior that Dzorgo describes as 'praetorianism' (Dzorgo 2001:92-95). Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) took over in a 1979 coup expressly intended to purge the government and courts of mismanagement and

Regime changes discouraged foreign investment, bred distrust of the state, and obstructed implementation of long-term development programs and economic policies.[152] State coffers diminished over the decades as foreign capital withdrew and foreign loans became scarce.

In the midst of instability, *African print* textiles manufacturing grew into Ghana's most successful sector in the seventies.[153] By 1975, there were 16 large and medium-sized textiles factories, and a garment industry with approximately 138 medium-sized firms in operation.[154] A total ban was placed on textiles imports that year to further bolster local production.[155] It was a point of national pride that textiles were manufactured using cotton grown in the north of the country, grey baft produced in Juapong, and printing and hand-blocking done in factories in the Volta and Greater Accra Regions. As a respondent recalled with nostalgia:

> "We used to have a very vibrant cotton industry. When I was in, let's say, primary school, we had a school garden and we were planting cotton. Other people were planting cotton and the Ghana cotton industry was vibrant, people would come and purchase it. They would sell it to the textiles companies to use to produce *print* fabrics."[156]

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corruption. Implementing extensive 'house cleaning', the AFRC executed eight senior officers (including General Acheampong, Lt. Gen. Akuffo, and members of the Supreme Court). In September 1979, previously scheduled general elections were held, and the AFRC handed power to Dr. Hilla Limann and the People's National Party (PNP). Rawlings' took power again in 1981 in a second coup referred to messianically as his "second coming".

[152] A "public culture of distrust" is a recurring reason given for economic failure in Ghana, and associated political instability (see Tettey et al 2003:3)

[153] Over 200 small scale textiles enterprises were established in the 1970s, many of which also engaged in artisanal techniques of *kente* weaving, hand screen printing, tie-dye and *adinkra* stamping. Spencer 1999 and Perani and Wolff 1999 examine how hand-made textiles changed with competition from local industrial production and international imports.

[154] Large sized textiles companies refers here to firms employing over 100 workers while medium sized companies are ones in which between 30 and 99 people are employed. Small scale firms are those with less than 30 employees.

[155] Littrell 1977:6.

[156] Warritay fieldnotes, 2012.

This was the heyday of textiles manufacturing in Ghana, and state protections and supports were at their peak.[157] In 1977, textiles manufacturing employed more than 25,000 people in the country, produced 129 million yards, and comprised approximately 27 percent of total income from industry.[158] ISI projects and the modernist visions espoused by Nkrumah had led to ongoing state investments in local cotton production, textiles manufacturing, and dress consumption. The entire supply chain and related dress practices were politically and discursively associated with national development.

Although the textiles industry led manufacturing in Ghana, it never operated at full capacity; even at its peak, manufacturing only reached 60% of total plant capacity. Even though textiles served as a significant source of employment and foreign exchange, the sector began a precipitous decline at the end of 1970s, at the same time as Ghana's national economy and political seemed to unravel.[159]

The Context of Crisis and Reasons for Liberalization

Ghana's economy declined significantly in the late 1970s with fluctuations in the price of cocoa in the world market, severe droughts in 1977, and over-valuation of the cedi.[160] Adding to domestic problems, price hikes in oil, first in 1973-1974 and again from 1979-1980, directed scarce foreign exchange towards expensive oil imports. In short, the late sixties and seventies were characterized by economic decline and

[157] It is important to note that despite the success of the textiles sector, industrialization remained a small part of Ghana's economy. Cocoa production soared and agricultural development remained Ghana's largest source of revenue (See MOTI 2002; Bruce-Amartey Jnr. et al 2014)
[158] Ewusi 1986:13; Textiles Garment and Leather Employees Union, 2012.
[159] Quartey 2006:135. Textiles declined in part because machinery required additional attention due to high temperatures and humidity, but failed to receive requisite attention due to import shortages.
[160] Aidam 2004:626. Ghana was the world's largest exporter of cocoa until commodity prices fell in 1978. The droughts of 1977 and 1983 impacted harvests of cash and food crops and created nationwide food insecurity.

political unrest. This period of protracted political and economic instability produced widespread immiseration, shortages of basic consumer goods, high inflation, staggering unemployment, and mass emigration – an estimated two million Ghanaians fled the country in search of economic opportunities and political asylum. A balance of payments crisis, currency devaluation, and forced debt rescheduling added to an already unfavorable economic environment. In a little over two decades, Ghana went from a prosperous colony and the champion of national independence in black Africa to a so-called economic 'basket-case'.[161] By 1981, the textiles industry had so sharply declined to the point that it was operating at a meager 20 percent of capacity.

Against this backdrop of economic decline and protracted political instability, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings and the Provisional Defence Council (PNDC) seized control from President Hilla Limann in a coup d'état on 31 December, 1981.[162] Rawlings declared a 'revolution' aimed at restoring order in Ghana by giving 'power to the people'.[163] Rawlings attributed the national economic crisis and shortage of consumer goods on the 'corrupt' practices of market traders – specifically their operation of a black market, alleged hoarding, and price inflation. His view emboldened vigilante groups, calling themselves 'revolutionaries', who confiscated goods from market traders and sold them at reduced prices. In 1981, Rawlings placed restrictions on textiles trade in markets, prohibiting the sale of foreign produced *African print* textiles and forcing traders to sell local equivalents.[164]

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[161] See Frimpong-Ansah 1991 and Gyimah-Boadi, 1993.

[162] After Rawlings carried out his first coup in 1979 with the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), he was in office for less than four months. The second coup in 1981 marked the beginning of almost twenty years of Rawlings in office.

[163] The prefix 'People's' was added to the newspaper, the army, police and other national institutions, and slogans like 'popular justice' and 'participatory democracy' circulated widely.

[164] See Gyimah-Boadi, 1993: 6 and Manuh, 1993:181. Rawlings' regime portrayed market traders as 'enemies of the people' and scapegoated them for national shortages of consumer goods. In 1979, after his first coup, Rawlings ordered the razing of Makola Market as a dramatic demonstration of his regime's willingness to address 'corruption' at all levels, including powerful market traders. The state

In addition to targeting market traders, professional and managerial classes came under attack, as did the church and judiciary. These groups were identified as 'regressive', or 'neocolonial', and accused of representing anti-revolutionary interests. Foreign capital was framed as 'imperial' and the PNDC threatened to nationalize foreign companies. These threats materialized in the state's brief acquisition of Ghana Textiles Company, which was owned at the time by the Anglo-Dutch- United Africa Company. In addition to contesting the national stake in foreign companies, Rawlings' government supported worker and union demands for labor reforms.[165] In the first months of his military regime "populist mobilization became the chief instrument for economic rehabilitation," and a decidedly militant socialist approach was adopted.[166]

In 1982, a combination of factors worsened national crises. First, credit services usually extended to Ghana by Nigeria were unexpectedly withheld, and tensions between the two countries grew as more than one million Ghanaians were expelled from Nigeria.[167] The sudden influx of forced returnees dramatically and rapidly increased unemployment in Ghana. In addition, severe drought coupled with widespread bush fires devastated local agriculture and led to unprecedented food shortages. Drought reduced the power supply from Akosombo hydroelectric dam which, in turn, had detrimental effects on industry and general quality of life.

Two other events in 1982 also changed the PNDC's course of action. One was the kidnapping and violent murder of three high court judges and a retired army officer in June. Despite immediate denouncement of the murders as the act of a

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acted violently against traders again in 1982 when street traders were expelled from Gondar barracks. In these and similar demonstrations, Rawlings regime expressed clear antipathy for trading segments of society during his early years in power.

[165] See Gyimah-Boadi et al (1982) and Rothchild et al. (1988).

[166] Gyimah-Boadi, 1993:6.

[167] The expulsion resulted in the naming of large checkered bags as 'Ghana must go'.

renegade group, 'revolutionary' factions of the government were still blamed for the murders. As 'revolutionary' violence was denounced, leftist ideologies also came under attack. The second event was an attempted coup in November. These deplorable social conditions and the growing military unrest combined such that by the end of 1982 Rawlings was compelled to seek immediate alternatives to his previous populist approach. Increasingly, Marxist and socialist ideologies and dependency theories were perceived as inadequate responses to Ghana's numerous national problems.[168]

Structural Adjustment and its Implications for Textiles Markets

In 1983, the Rawlings administration together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and bilateral donors, began implementing Economic Recovery Programs (ERPs) and Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in Ghana.[169] Rawlings presided as military leader of Ghana for the next ten years, and followed that with two terms as democratically elected head of state with the National Democratic Congress (NDC). [170] His combined eighteen years in office provided continuity in the

[168] As the state turned to foreign loans and conditional assistance, revolutionary ideas died hard. Workers, students, and left-leaning intelligentsia expressed feelings of betrayal by the government, while middle classes remained resentful of the regime's initial political and economic repression (Gyimah-Boadi, 1993:8).

[169]Rawlings' years in office coincided with and reinforced the wave of neoliberal indoctrination in other parts of Africa and the world in the eighties. Although initial steps towards liberalism were taken by the Ghanaian government, the international ultra-capitalist assault led by Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Germany's Helmut Kohl exerted more pressure to implement neoliberal policies. Ghana earned a reputation as one of the World Bank's poster children for adjustment and, to ensure desired results, the Bank provided Ghana with additional personnel and capital. Any evaluation of Ghana's implementation of adjustment programs must take this exceptional treatment into account.

[170] The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 exerted more pressure on military regimes in African countries to respond to Western demands for democracy. Political liberalism and the freedom of the individual citizen become part of the conditions for market freedoms of modern capitalism (Boafo-Arthur 2007). In 1991, Rawlings moved to reinstate a civilian government. Despite the PNDC's human rights abuses, Rawlings transformed his military regime to a political party known as the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and went on to win an overwhelming majority of votes in democratic elections held in 1992. The charismatic, strong-handed Jerry John Rawlings ruled as civilian President of Ghana for two terms, ending his second term in the year 2000.

systematic downsizing of government and introduction of neoliberal reforms amenable to IMF and World Bank loan conditionalities.[171]

Market reforms were implemented aggressively and with swift results. Inflation dropped from 122% in 1983 to 10% in 1985 and GNP changed from negative growth to a modest but positive 1.5% over the same period.[172] At the same time, Adjustment Programs required that the state reduce direct intervention in industry, cut social welfare services, and decrease the number of civil servants. Approximately 50,000 civil servants were retrenched between 1987 and 1990, with another 12% of the state's workers made redundant in 1991.[173] Rawlings enticed international trade partners to make major investments in Ghana by promising to create an increasingly 'enabling environment' for capital. So-called 'barriers' to trade were lifted, and the state relinquished explicit market planning and intervention. The top state priorities became fiscal stability, currency devaluation, non-inflationary growth, debt re-servicing, and market liberalization.[174]

In the textiles industry, liberalization eased restrictions on manufacturing inputs, however, protections for local factories were diminished.[175] By 1990, virtually all subsidies to local factories had disappeared, and uncompetitive state-owned enterprises folded or were acquired by private capital.[176] Tariffs were lowered and

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[171] Governments before Rawlings had implemented liberal development policies. The First Republic from 1975 to 1966, the Second Republic from 1969 to 1972, and the Third Republic from 1979 to 1981 all attempted to introduce liberal policies in Ghana, but each of their efforts were cut short by military coups. 'Continuity' was the NDC's election platform in 1992, a message intended to imply continuity of policies, but which also applied to the self-succession and continuity of Rawlings's rule (Boafo-Arthur 2007).

[172] Frazer 2005:586.

[173] See Donkor 1997:127; and Rothschild 1991:134

[174] Between 1987 and 1989, for example, 58.3% of exports went to IMF repayments, while 26.26% was allocated to non-IMF debt obligations. The debt burden eased by the early nineties, but still represented between a fifth and a third of Ghana's exports (Donkor 1997:155).

[175] Lall et al 1994:34.

[176] As the state relinquished ownership, Dutch, Taiwanese and British capital invested in Ghanaian factories.

restrictions lifted, textiles imports grew: from the U.S. alone, textiles imports expanded from $35 million in 1992 to $57 million in 1998.[177] Shifts towards so-called 'free markets' forced local manufacturers to compete with better capitalized and protected industries elsewhere in the world.[178] However, local firms continued to experience liquidity and management problems, and output and employment fell with time. Ghana's textiles industry generated $27.2 million in revenue in 1992 and a meager $3.173 million in 1998.[179] By the year 2000, only 5,000 people were employed in textiles manufacturing.

Trade in second-hand clothing, which had increased significantly in the seventies, experienced an additional boost with liberalization of markets.[180] Today, Germany, the United States, Japan and the United Kingdom are the biggest suppliers of second-hand clothing to African markets.[181] Products are interpreted variably as 'charitable' giving to some, and 'dumping' to others. Both ways, used clothing poses the largest threat to continued operations of *African print* factories in Ghana.

Despite introducing more measures of macroeconomic stability, Structural Adjustment was controversial for the ways it increased inequality and limited provision of social services.[182] As a former Secretary General of the Trades Union

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[177] See MOTI 2002; Quartey 2006:136. Textiles imports from the Netherlands, China, India, the U.S., E.U., Nigeria, and Thailand also expanded.

[178] In addition to Structural Adjustment Programs, Ronal Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl were installing an international 'free trade' regime through their domestic policies and pressures imposed on another nations. And, in addition, the World Trade Organization (WTO), established in 1995, created space for multinational agreements intended to entrench market deregulation.

[179] Quartey 2006:139.

[180] Stearns 2001:106.

[181] The second-hand clothing industry generates an estimated $1billion of global trade every year (Bade and Barber 2005). It supplies items as varied as underwear and intimates, casual wear, accessories, business attire and formal clothing. See also Hansen 1999, 2000.

[182] The social costs of reform are well documented; For critiques and analyses of the costs of SAPs see: Hutchful 1987; Herbst 1993; Rothchild 1991; Jeffries 1991; Akonor 2006; Aryeetey et al 2000; Konadu-Agyemang 2001; Aryeetey and Kanbur 2008. The government established the Program of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD). For some scholars, creating the program was an admission of the severity of adjustment policies on the poor, and the need to protect people against the ravishes of the market (Ninsin, 1991: 64-69). In addition to falling social services,

Congress concisely put it, "Life has continued to be terrible for workers. There is no money in the system as the IMF devaluation has wiped out the purchasing power of the *cedi*. There is food now but people do not have the money to buy. The government that said that the coup of December 31 was a revolution for the workers and masses is now running the country like a business."[183] Indeed, Rawlings' government had become more technocratic, and focused on boosting foreign and local business interests.

Table 1: Employment in Ghana's textiles industry, 1975-2000

Year	*1975*	*1995*	*2000*
Employment	25,000	7,000	5,000
Output (million yards)	129	46	65

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Table 2: Percent of GDP for Major Economic Sectors, 1960 -2007

(Value Added as % of GDP) [185]

Sector	**1960-1969**	**1970-1979**	**1980-1989**	**1990-1999**	**2000-2007**
Agriculture	40	51	52	40	36
Industry	19	17	13	23	25
Services	38	32	35	37	39

growth in Ghana actually fell by 5% in the first eight years following reforms (Boafo-Arthur 2007). The positive turn in Ghana's economy in the nineties was coupled with other geopolitical and world market changes, such as the end of the Cold War.

[183] George Yankey 1985, Donkor 1997:159

[184] Source: MOTI, 2002

[185] Source: Dadzie 2013:131 (Compiled using World Development Indicators)

Table 3: Share of Labor Force in Sectors of the Economy (%)[186]

Sector	**1960**	**1970**	**1980**	**1990**	**2000**	**2007**
Agriculture	64	58	53	63	55	56
Industry	14	17	20	10	14	13
Services	22	25	27	27	31	31

Table 4: Textile Imports by Type, 1997-2000[187]

Year	*Wax Print*		*Java/Fancy (and similar print)*		*Calico (Bleached Fabric)*	
	Qty/Vol. (KG)	*US $ (000)*	*Qty/Vol. (KG)*	*US $ (000)*	*Qty/Vol. (KG)*	*US $ (000)*
1997	30,775	106	152,300	406	9.418	41
1998	11.423	571	46,881	204	80,138	601
1999	86,700	2,318	136,634	477	182,091	1,044
2000	135,197	1,313	455,764	1,818	1,034,978	5,247

The shift towards 'free markets' in Ghana occurred at the same time as garment companies in Europe and North America relocated production *en masse* to low-wage countries in Asia and Latin America. [188] Changes in information technology and

[186] Source: Dadzie 2013: 131. Compiled using Quarterly Digest of Statistics, Ghana Statistical Service, and World Development Indicators.
[187] Source: MOTI, 2002
[188] Especially since the end of the 1960s, South Korea, Taiwan, China, Turkey, Pakistan, Brazil and Mexico have emerged as powerful competitors in the international textile industry. These 'newcomers' join the likes of Japan, Hong Kong and India as other important non-Western textile manufacturers. Also, more recently, other nations have become important global competitors. This includes: Macao, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Argentina, Guatemala, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Israel, Greece and Egypt. This last group of nations have preferential arrangements with the European Union which is the largest textiles market in the world.

communications also ushered in a new phase of 'globalization'. Though much contested, these changes prompted a number of scholars to proclaim the end of Fordism and the dawn of a new post-Fordist era. The argument, in short, is that along with increased time-space compression, capitalism has become 'fragmented' and production needs to adjust to the new imperative of 'flexibility'. The notion of 'flexible-specialization' captures the ways production appears to be moving towards multi-skilled, flexible workforces characterized more by innovation and 'craftsmanship', than rote Fordist production.[189] Additionally, manufacturing has come under pressure to cater to different niche markets; Fordist techniques of producing a standard product at scale have been replaced by small-batch production of differentiated products made possible with new advances in technology. The need for production to respond rapidly to market changes has created new 'just-in-time' delivery of inputs and consumer products, as well as novel forms of subcontracting, or 'outsourcing'.

Lash and Urry (1987) describe these changes as the onset of 'disorganized capitalism', pointing to the decline (or inability) of nation-states to regulate economic relations, and the rise of multinational corporations with boundary-transgressing reach. In the eighties and nineties, research studies and journalistic exposés brought to world attention deplorable conditions for textiles and garment workers in so-called 'sweatshops in Asia, Central and South America.[190]

In addition, global textiles trade was subject to regulation and rationalization through the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 and ratification of multilateral agreements. Most notable for Ghana were: the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC),

[189] Piore and Sabel 1984.
[190] See here Ross 1997; Collins 2003.

Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA), Lomé Convention, Contonou Agreement, and the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS).[191] Global regulatory regimes contributed to the so-called 'opening' of markets and world restructuring of textiles and apparel production.

In the nineties, textiles manufacturing technology underwent dramatic changes as dyeing and finishing processes were subject to increased automation.[192] Firms with access to new technology enjoyed market advantages, and competing firms imitated, innovated, or fell behind. China emerged as a world leader in industrial manufacturing. Key reasons for China's expanded role in world production include: an abundance of low-cost labor, strategic state planning, access to capital and leading technology, and strong regional and international trading partnerships. By 1995, China was the world's largest exporter of both textiles and apparel.[193] When China joined the WTO in 2001 and when the MFA expired in 2005, textiles manufacturers in China gained unprecedented access to consumer markets around the world. [194]

China's provisioning of textiles and garments to African countries is contentious. On the one hand, owing to the low cost of labor, products manufactured in China are often inexpensive and accessible to consumers with limited purchasing power. In this way, 'cheap' goods 'democratize' consumption.[195] On the other hand,

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[191] For impact of trade agreements on textiles economy in Ghana, see Nordås 2004; de Valk 1996; MOTI 2009; Quartey 2006.
[192] In terms of technologies, microelectronic innovations enhance comparative advantage for companies with the resources and skills to use them. Computer-Aided Techniques (CAT), Computed-Aided Design (CAD), Computer-Aided Engraving (CAE), and Computer-Aided Coloring (CAC) permit manufacturers to improve textile design, quality control, flexibility, efficiency and, ultimately, increase market shares.
[193] In 2002, China's world market share in textiles stood at near 25 percent and approximately 30 percent in apparel (Nordås 2004:14).
[194] The Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) was implemented under the auspices of the WTO as a measure to phase-out textile quotas. When the ATC expired on January 1, 2005, this marked the end of the Multi Fibre Agreement (MFA). The end of the MFA meant.
[195] Warritay fieldnotes, 2012.

products destined for African consumer markets undergo the least inspection, and include the most 'inferior' goods in the world.[196] The (proven) assumption that low-quality goods will be purchased and that few regulations will be enforced, encourages the increased supply of inferior goods to African markets. Many of products are practically disposable; breaking, tearing, and malfunctioning after a few uses. As a consumer in Accra expressed: "I get seriously concerned when I go to the market and I see something from China. Most of the time it is not quality. The rationale behind the production is that they're coming to a market where the majority of the people are poor and if they make it quality they cannot get a lot of people to buy."[197]

In the early 2000s *African print* textiles manufactured in China and other countries flooded Ghana's markets. While some of the *prints* from China are clearly the lowest quality goods available, one Chinese brand in particular, Phoenix Hitarget, produces high enough quality *prints* at a low-enough price point to satisfy a wide segment of the market. Overall, liberalization in Ghana provided a wider range of textiles goods to consumers at different price points, qualities, colors, designs, and origins. Despite decades of state investments, textiles manufacturing waned in the absence of state subsidies and protections, and in the face of competitive pressures from *African print* imports and second-hand clothing. [198] In relation to distribution, liberalization required traders in open-air markets to sell larger volumes of inexpensive products in order to earn their subsistence and living wages.

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[196] In the hierarchy of import standards, the highest quality goods are sent to Europe, then Asian and North American countries, South America and the Middle East follow, and Africa receives the lowest quality goods in the world.

[197] Warritay fieldnotes, 2012.

[198] See In spite of devastating declines, textiles and garment production, alongside woodworking, metalworking and food processing comprised 70% of manufacturing employment in Ghana in the late '90s and early 2000s (Frazer 2005:591).

Neoliberalism: State Projects in the Market-Led Moment

When the lawyer and businessman John Kufuor won presidential elections with the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the year 2000 his administration redoubled efforts to support capital and attract foreign investment. In his inaugural speech, he rallied citizens to fight the nation's greatest enemy, which he named as 'poverty' and which he argued could be defeated by bringing 'prosperity' through private sector development. Kufour encouraged Ghanaians across sectors to capitalize on state loans and training programs directed towards building businesses. His government, he insisted, would create an "enabling atmosphere" for "business to flourish"; enforce the rule of law and renew its commitments to the private sector. Kufour reassured capital at home and abroad that "Ghana is open for business" and his administration would "launch a golden age of business and enterprise."[199]

In important ways, Kufuor's administration continued economic policies and strategies started in the Rawlings regime.[200] However, his administration cleared a more open path for business, attracting massive foreign direct investment (FDI), intensifying trade liberalization, and providing subsidies and tax incentives for the private sector. The most significant assistance program launched in Kufuor's two terms in office was the President's Special Initiative (PSI). Introduced in 2001, the PSI identified local business opportunities with high potential for profitability and global competitiveness; top commodities selected included textiles and garments, salt, and cassava.[201] The PSI introduced 'Free Exporting Zones' in the industrial suburb of Tema, and supported exports to the United States through the African Growth and

[199] John Kufuor, Inaugural Presidential Speech, January 7, 2001. Accessed from http://allafrica.com/stories/200101070055.html
[200] The administrations differed greatly in their attitudes towards capital; see Arthur 2002; 2006.
[201] See Apraku 2002.

Opportunity Act (AGOA), established in 2000.[202] An estimated 70,000 jobs and $3.4 billion in revenue was expected from AGOA-related textiles and garment exports.[203] Members of government optimistically suggested that the PSI would provide Ghana the competitive edge necessary to "become a significant player in the world garment and textile trade."[204]

At the time*, African print* manufactured in China was growing in popularity. Between 2002 and 2005, the volume of *African prints* manufactured in China and supplied to West and Central Africa grew from 7.5 million yards to 250 million yards.[205] By 2007, China accounted for 11.7% of total trade in Ghana, and the Ghana became the second largest importer of Chinese goods on the African continent.[206] More generally, trade between China and African countries rose from $10 million in the 1980s to an estimated $168 billion in 2009.[207] The growing volume of products from China is accompanied by a smaller volume but significant growth of Chinese nationals living and working in Ghana.[208]

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[202] AGOA was passed by the Clinton administration with the intention of reducing trade barriers for export products moving from African countries to U.S. markets. Export Processing Zones have come under attack in different regions for their tendency to encourage the exploitation of unprotected labor, yet similar questions of Ghana's EPZ are seldom asked. AGOA gives 41 African countries duty-free access to markets in the United States. The trade agreement identifies three hubs on the continent located in Accra, Gabarone, and Nairobi, and charges each with a mandate to increase fabric and garment exports, among other exports. Initially intended to expire in 2008, AGOA was extended to 2015. The PSI also setup the Export Action Programme for Garments and Textiles in Ghana. www.newsinghana.com/economy/archive/kufuor-launch.htm

[203] Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2010. The main export destination for Ghanaian manufactured textiles as of 2004 were the European Union (55% of exports), the United State (25%), and the Economic Community of West African States (15%) (the remaining 5% of exports went primarily to southern Africa) (Quarety 2006:140).

[204] See Arthur, 2006:38.

[205] See Arts 2012:5.

[206] MOTI 2009:5; Liu 2010:185. For growth of Chinese trade in Ghana see also Jenkins and Edwards, 2006

[207] See Zheng 2010.

[208] See Sautman 2006.

The 'China Threat'

In 2008, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) returned to power with the election of Dr. Atta Mills, and remained in power with the election of John Dramani Mahama in 2012.[209] President Mahama's economic policies maintained Ghana's neoliberal orientation, and bolstered the logic of development through 'free trade' and a favorable business environment. In 2010, Ghana was declared a Middle Income Country.[210] The next year, GDP grew at an astounding 14.5 percent, the highest growth rate in the world that year.[211] FDI was a significant reason for Ghana's high growth rate – FDI of an estimated US$3 billion per annum flowed into the country between 2009 and 2012.[212] Also significant was the discovery and exploration of oil reserves. Even as growth rates fell to 8 percent in 2012 and the national deficit rose to 12 percent of GDP, investor confidence remained high and the IMF assessed Ghana's growth as robust.[213]

However, textiles manufacturing continued to struggle. In 2013, only four *print* factories were in operation, none worked at full capacity, and managers expressed

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[209] President Mills was viewed by some as a puppet of former President Rawlings, who continued to loom as a powerful figure in the political wings. Mills passed away suddenly in 2012, and his VP, John Mahama assumed office before winning elections later that year. As Ghana's first president from the north, Mahama's election into office highlighted the unevenness of regional political participation as well as regional development. Historically, northern regions have received less investment than the rest of the country, and Mahama's election was interpreted by some as a victory for northerners as well as the NDC.

[210] The World Bank definition of a middle-income country (MIC) requires GDP per capita to exceed US $1000. Because there are no social requirements to middle-income status, being middle income does not necessarily correlate with poverty reduction, or improvements in indicators of social well-being or local infrastructure. In 2013, there were 23 MICs across Africa, including Gabon and South Sudan– both politically volatile countries at the time with massive inequality amongst other challenges.

[211] IMF Press Release No. 12/197; May 29, 2012. http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2012/pr12197.htm (accessed January 4, 2013).

[212] http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ghana/overview. High investor confidence was evident in the oversubscription of government issued bonds. World Bank, "Ghana Looks to Retool its Economy". July 18, 2011. http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2011/07/18/ghana-looks-to-retool-its-economy-as-it-reaches-middle-income-status (accessed January 4,2013).

[213] IMF Public Information Notice (PIN) No. 13/67; June 17, 2013. http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pn/2013/pn1367.htm (accessed January 4, 2013).

fears of imminent closure. Electricity outages, the proverbial *'dumsor dumsor'*, actively contributed to the sector's decline.[214] Respondents pointed to inconsistencies in electricity and exorbitant costs of running backup generators as major causes for the industries decline.[215] Technological problems (namely poor or rundown and outdated machinery) were also cited, as well as ineffective management, limited vertical integration, and the lack of specialization.[216] Reports published by the World Bank linked deindustrialization in the sector to the absence of good governance and insufficient human capacity to effectively execute reform policies.[217] See Appendix 2 for photos of operating and non-operating sections of a textiles factory.

Additionally, Ghanaian traders began to play a different role in *African print* production.[218] Increasingly, traders were corresponding directly with manufacturers in China to produce *print* textiles of their own creation, or to modify patterns and color palettes of classic *prints* belonging to Ghanaian and Dutch brands. Traders place orders electronically by scanning and emailing designs to manufacturers in China; this method allows quick reproduction of *prints* soon after they enter market circulation; it also reduces the time and cost of going to China to do business.[219] Some decide to

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[214] On the African continent, Egypt, Mauritius, and South Africa have seen some success in textile and apparel production, but few other African nations have been remarkably successful on the global stage. The top textiles exporters in 2002 were China, Italy, Germany, South Korea, France, Belgium, Japan, the UK, Turkey and India. In clothing the top ten exporters in 2002 were China, Italy, Germany, France, Turkey, India, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Mexico (Nordås 2004: 14). Ghana's contribution to world textiles and apparel markets remains small.

[215] In interviews, representatives of textiles manufacturers in Tema cited energy disruptions as the number one factor causing declines in production.

[216] de Valk 1996:158.

[217] World Bank 1995; Sahn et al 1997.

[218] Traders are building on their historical role of relaying feedback to manufacturers about the popularity of *print* designs; *African print* markets are fast-changing and fickle, and market women and retailers have the most intimate understanding of trends. As such, they are well positioned to assume more active roles in design through entrepreneurial ventures.

[219] The speed of global communications creates more difficulty in policing intellectual property.

travel to China and join growing numbers of African traders, business people, and designers visiting markets in Guangzhou.

The issue of counterfeit and illegal *print* textiles is a growing concern for the government, and has received increasing academic attention (Axelsson and Sylvanus 2010; Axelsson 2012; Haugen 2011; Li, Ma, Desheng 2009; Lyons and Brown 2010; Lyons, Brown, and Li 2008; Sylvanus 2008, 2010). To avoid legal sanctions and sidestep import duties, traders smuggle imitation *prints* into Ghana through the so-called 'Free Port' in Togo. *Prints* are smuggled into Ghana through a combination of corrupt and illegal practices across borders, including bribes, misreporting cargo, and concealing bundles of textiles in barrels and, allegedly, even coffins. As no customs duties are paid on smuggled *prints*, they can be retailed at lower costs than comparable taxed textiles. The challenge of policing borders and regulating imports is complicated by the fact that in addition to legal imports, some *prints* are illegal imitations; others are original designs but illegal imports. Customs and Ministry officials lack resources, information, and incentives to accurately limit the entry of illicit *print* textiles. An *African print* black market has developed with high returns for traders who are able to circumvent state taxes and policing task forces. [220]

Although Ghanaian market traders and customs officials are implicated in the production and smuggling of imitation *prints*, Chinese manufacturers are frequently framed as the 'threat' to local manufacturing and retail. In 2006, the Ghanaian Union Traders Association (GUTA) called for a boycott of illegal/imitation *prints*

[220] Imitation has many faces. In some cases, manufacturers illegally reprint trademark designs and market them under different brand names; in other cases, manufacturers use brand names similar to their competitors (i.e. 'Primex' as opposed to 'Printex'). In addition, legally manufactured products typically display their country of origin in the selvage; however, imitations omit this information. The absence of details about place of manufacture is often a telltale of illegal imitation.

manufactured in China that they claimed were a threat to textiles manufacturing, the retail business, the tax system and state security.[221]

While *African print* manufactured in the Netherlands is generally imported through legal channels, its presence in Ghanaian markets undoubtedly impacts the ability of local manufacturers to compete. In fact, the deindustrialization of textiles in Ghana relates directly to expansions in second-hand clothing as well as the prevalence of both inexpensive imports from China and premium imports from the Netherlands. During the Nkrumah and Rawlings administrations, the state framed *Dutch wax* as a representative of colonial European interests and promoted local products as an alternative. By contrast, at the time of fieldwork, premium imports from the Netherlands avoided were not criticized or framed as 'threats' in state and popular commentary; second-hand clothing and inexpensive *prints* were represented as the primary culprits of deindustrialization.

In a compelling study of the production of meaning, Linn Axelsson (2012) examines the construction of *African print* imports from China as a 'threat' to Ghana in economic and symbolic terms. Axelssson shows how the notion of 'smuggled' *prints* from China is constructed by the evasion of formal channels of taxation and tariffs; how *prints* that infringe of intellectual property are constructed as 'counterfeit'; and *prints* that promote China's economy rather than Ghana's are constructed as 'morally unjust'.

Axelsson identifies several key strategies deployed by the state in response to the 'China threat'. First, the state created a single import corridor in the port city of Takoradi, which delayed and obstructed the flow of goods and was, consequently, short-lived. Somewhat more successfully, a task force was established and authorized

[221] Odoi-Larbi 2007; Axelsson 2012.

to periodically raid open-air markets in search of 'counterfeit' textiles. The task force confiscated and burned counterfeit merchandise in public spectacles intended to create financial hardship for offending traders and demonstrate the government's intolerance of textiles fraud. Most significantly, the state launched National Friday Wear and Everyday Wear programs to encourage consumption of locally produced *African print*. During my fieldwork, National Friday Wear was evidently an important driver of Ghana's textiles economy. The section below examines this influential policy.

National Friday Wear

National Friday Wear was launched by President Kufuor's administration in 2004, and today is referred to colloquially as 'Friday Wear' or 'Traditional Fridays'. Unlike 'Friday Wear', the 'Everyday Wear' program launched a couple of years later did not gain traction. Both programs were launched to assist local manufacturers through consumption incentives. As an employee of the Ministry of Trade and Industry explained, 'Friday Wear' is intended to celebrate "African" traditions while simultaneously supporting local textiles manufacturing, apparel and fashion industries.

Through 'Friday Wear' the state reinforces the notion of *African print* as 'traditional' clothing, and strategically selects from the past in the service of a national development project. By associating *African print* with weekly rituals, the program links the textile to national culture and traditions, and creates a shared national experience of dress in Ghana.[222] The program urges Ghanaians to wear *African print* clothing to schools and workplaces on Fridays, acknowledging that the impulse on other days of the week is towards 'Western' wear. Institutions and businesses are encouraged to place orders with local manufacturers for *African print* textiles designed

[222] See Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983.

with institution colors and insignias, business names and logos. Institutions and organizations are encouraged to give or sell '*company' cloth* to employees, members, clients and students who, in turn, are expected to use *company cloth* to tailor uniforms and clothing of their own design.

Unlike in Europe and North America, apparel production in Ghana (and other parts of West and Central Africa) exists largely as a crafts industry in the informal economy. Garments are produced on demand by tailors in street-side ateliers and makeshift workspaces in the backrooms of homes and commercial districts. As a state policy regarding textiles, 'Friday Wear' prioritizes dress practices as the element with potential to generate employment and profits in Ghana. From my own observations, I would agree.

In some respects, 'Traditional Fridays' has been wildly successful. Respondents in Accra cited the program as a reason for their interest in *African print* clothing. Everyone from school children to college students, low-level employees and business executives, state officials, market traders and bankers, all wear *African print* on Fridays. Commemorative *prints* are ordered by churches for their diocese and parishes, and small businesses commemorate milestones with custom ordered *prints.* For individuals and families with the resources to do so, names and portraits are printed on *cloth* with bright colors and bold designs. There is a long history of commemorative *African prints* that recognize important world and national figures such as presidents, royal figures, Popes and archbishops. 'Friday Wear' capitalizes on this practice and expands it as a cultural norm. Local textiles manufacturing brands such as Printex (formerly Spintex Ghana Limited), Akosombo Textiles Limited (ATL), Ghana Textiles Printing (GTP), and Woodin receive the bulk of these orders and, within two or three weeks, respond to institutional and individual demand.

In addition to influencing local flexible specialization through demand for commemorative and *company cloth,* 'Friday Wear' increases *African print* consumption more generally. With liberalization, consumers now purchase more local and imported *prints,* more classics and more counterfeit. Fashion-conscious people are encouraged to acquire more *print* clothing so as not to repeat outfits, and in order to set or keep up with new trends. The latest *African print* fashions are believed to emerge from universities, where entrepreneurial students started experimenting producing *African print* sandals, jewelry, and hair clips at the end of the first decade of the Twentieth Century. Across Accra, a host of high and low-end fashion designers have emerged who are producing a range of new accessories and garments with *African print* accents, inserts and facings.[223]

As trade liberalization expands the availability of inexpensive *print* imports, it also expands opportunities in garment production. The Hitarget brand manufactured in China has become an inexpensive avenue for designers and consumers to expand *African print* inventory and wardrobes. In this sense, 'Friday Wear' has failed to assist local textiles manufacturers. Consumers are generally aware of product provenance – they know Hitarget is 'from China', they reference 'Dutch' wax, and 'local' brands are well known. For many consumers, the politics of provenance are secondary to the pressures of price. Additionally, the state's promotion of 'Friday Wear' fails to specify which textiles brands consumers should purchase. Consumer choice is not coupled with market education, and consumers shopping for 'Friday Wear' textiles place considerations of price, aesthetics, and status above the poorly explained priority of patriotism. Expressing a rare perspective, a young man I interviewed suggested: "I am interested in what I buy, because at the end of the day I know that if I buy from a local

[223] In interviews, respondents suggested that 'new styles' come from college campuses, especially University of Ghana, Legon.

person, the money will go to the market woman there, it will eventually end up with GTP or wherever. So I am particularly interested, but people don't care. Many people don't care."

The unwillingness of the state to regulate imports or influence consumer choice is aligned with neoliberal principles that limit explicit state planning of the economy. However, under current conditions, textiles from China and Holland are poised to out-compete Ghanaian textiles manufacturers in the near and distant future.

By contrast, garment production in Ghana is fast-expanding. The prevalence of inexpensive *prints* expands creative livelihoods in the forms of tailoring and fashion design. However, tailoring and fashion are precarious; the former owing to its informality and the latter is notoriously capricious.[224] Creative industries in the informal sector in Ghana include tailors, hairdressers, cobblers, and a range of wood, metal, leather and other artisans producing for tourist markets. Garment production is the largest industry in the informal economy, and most garment workers in Ghana are women.[225]

Tailors, Designers, and Entrepreneurship

The informality of tailoring makes reliable data difficult to obtain, however, the clothing industry is believed to employ more people than any other manufacturing sector in Ghana. Tailors work in backrooms and backroads of every neighborhood. Tailoring is offered as a track in senior secondary schools, at vocational institutions,

[224] The National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI) offers region-specific supports across several informal sectors.

[225] See Ghana Investment Promotion Center, 2004; Ghana Statistical Service, 2005; Vandyk and Fianu 2012; Osei-Boateng and Edward Ampratwum 2011. Estimates suggest more than 40 per cent of informal workers in Ghana are employed in garment production.

polytechnics, and at the college level.[226] Training institutes and programs provide practical and theoretical instruction in tailoring and dressmaking, and a small number of design institutes offer courses on textiles and fashion design, as well as opportunities to meet industry professionals. .[227] Over 600,000 apprentices per year receive practical training from the Ghana National Tailors and Dressmakers Association (GNTDA). In addition, the Local Enterprise and Skills Programme (LESDEP) provides supports by periodically donating sewing equipment and financial supports to GNTDA regional offices.[228] Additionally, tailoring businesses benefit from state supports extended to small-scale enterprises (SSEs) and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), defined as enterprises with fewer than thirty and fifty employees, respectively. The majority of SMEs in Ghana are family-owned businesses, or small enterprises run by artisans and petty traders in tailoring/fashion, food and beverages, and crafts including woodwork and jewelry.[229]

Despite the existence of formal training channels, tailoring in Ghana remains mostly unregulated and informal. Most tailors learn their craft through apprenticeships; exchanging free labor for on-the-job training and experience.[230] Part

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[226] Vocational training is a large part of Ghana's educational and economic structure. Nationally, there exist about 300 vocational training institutions (VTI), 10 polytechnics, and 22 technical training institutes. Other important vocational bodies include, Vocational and Technical Education Division (VOTEC); National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI); and National Coordinating Committee for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NACVET) (Haan & Serrieré, 2002).

[227] Given the informality of the sector, reliable data is scarce. However, one estimate suggests 400,000 apprentices are trained in the sector every year. http://ghanaskills.org/sites/default/files/Factsheet%20CAT%20compressed.pdf

[228] In 2012, LESDEP donated 110 sewing machines to GNTDA, comprising 44 hand sewing machines, 22 industrial sewing machines, 22 embroidery machines, and 22 overlock machines. In addition, each GNTDA regional center received a motorcycle and computer to assist daily operations and communication with members (Warritay fieldnotes).

[229] Quartey and Kayanula 2000.

[230] Training arrangements include the exchange of labor for skills, payment in cash and kind (especially transportation, accommodation, food) (Giese and Thiel 2014). Apprentices often have to work without compensation and demonstrate loyalty to business owners in order to earn greater economic independence. Report are regularly circulated of abuse and exploitation while working as apprentices and employees in garment businesses.

of the allure of tailoring is the possibility of self-employment with minimal inputs. In sharp contrast to *print* textiles manufacturing – which is capital-intensive, increasingly automated, and heavily reliant on foreign materials and technological inputs - *print* dress production is labor-intensive and highly responsive to local fashions and demand.

Across West and Central Africa, tailoring persists in large part because of the low cost of labor in the region. In many cases, the cost of fabric is greater than the cost of tailoring labor. At the time of fieldwork, tailoring services in Accra varied from 8 to 110 GHS (approximately $3 to $45 USD), while six yards of *African print* cost between 35 to 200 GHS (approximately $15 to $120 USD). The quality of tailored *African print* clothing varies as much as its pricing, and ranges from amateur-looking garments to high fashion finishings. Finding a good tailor is a common challenge for consumers, and stories are frequently told of unskilled, inconsistent, and unreliable tailors who "waste time" and "spoil *cloth"*. Conversely, good tailors are treasured and kept busy by high demand.

Some scholars argue that small-scale apparel production in Ghana is pre-capitalist in nature, because it is personalized, produced when orders are received, not oriented to a generic consumer, and not dependent on advertising (Ninsin 1991; Tettey et al 2003). They argue that Ghana's small-scale manufacturing firms clearly demonstrate an "inability or willingness to deal with the risks of producing directly for an impersonal market and then finding previously unknown customers for goods already produced" (Tettey et al. 2003: 37). [231] However, in my view, the use of industrial textiles to earn wages through custom tailoring is a form of flexible specialization. Moreover, the personalization of garment production in Ghana is the

[231] Berman also suggests SMEs operate a "precapitalist orientation" owing to an absence in sales expertise, sophisticated advertising and inventory control (Berman 2003:37).

locus of mass employment and creative expression related to *African print*. It is full of economic and aesthetic potential.

Conclusion

Ghana's developmentalist state is understood broadly as the administrations from Kwame Nkrumah to Jerry Rawlings in which state projects focused on establishing and promoting textiles manufacturing through a variety of subsidies and protections for local factories, and restrictions on textiles imports. After the introduction of so-called 'free market' policies, low-cost textiles, especially from China, proliferated the market and contributed to deindustrialization at the same times as they opened opportunities for dress production in the informal economy.

Today, the neoliberal state remains invested in textiles as an industry of national importance, however, 'free market' principles discourage the state's direct market intervention. As such, the state's current textiles projects promote *African print* consumption and dress entrepreneurship through the Friday Wear program. However, consumers are drawn to low-cost and high status goods, which lead them towards *African prints* manufactured in China and Holland, respectively. In contemporary textiles markets in Ghana, foreign textiles manufacturers benefit more from increased consumption, while local benefits are concentrated in informal dress economies. Whereas the commodification of cultural dress was linked to national industrial projects in the Twentieth Century, in the neoliberal moment it is linked through 'Friday Wear' to individual dress and fashion projects.

However, also thanks to 'Friday Wear', *African print* apparel production is fast expanding. Artisanal tailors and fashion designers are capitalizing on employment opportunities made possible by the prevalence of 'cheap' *print* and growing demand

for ‘traditional’ ‘African’ fashion. The dialogic relationship between tailors and consumers becomes an important moment of creative exchange that links the national culture project to apparel, rather than industrial, production.

CHAPTER 4

BRANDING AND THE MYSTIFICATION OF OWNERSHIP

Choice and Competition in Neoliberal Textiles Markets

The wave of imports in the early 2000s increased the variety, availability, and affordability of *African print* in Ghana's textiles markets, and intensified tensions between historically dominant brands and new market entrants. To protect, or preserve, their market positions, historically dominant brands redesigned retail, marketing, and advertising practices in ways that carved out niche markets and catered to consumers in the middle and upper classes. New retail and marketing efforts simultaneously linked branded products and spaces to idealized consumer qualities, and constructed brand representations in the minds of consumers. The market was increasingly structured as a hierarchy, ranking products and consumer segments to their different valuations of 'quality' and price.

Today, a multiplicity of brands, each associated with particular representations, give textiles markets the appearance of competition, and the plethora of *African print* products give consumers the appearance of choice. With the supply of numerous textiles products, in a range of retail spaces, there appears to be 'consumer sovereignty', which in economics refers to the market serving needs of consumers through mechanisms of competition. As per neoliberal common sense, freedom of choice is maximized through competition, and the "impersonal force" of competition is perceived as the fairest and most effective method to distribute social goods and risks (Hayek 1944:69-70). However, closer examination reveals hidden relationships

between leading brands that complicate the impression of multiple competing players. While many brands exist, a small number of firms own them.

In this chapter, I examine the leading brands in *African print* markets and uncover the continued importance of Dutch imperial advantages, and the growing importance of manufacturers in China. I describe the representation and differentiation of brands through marketing and retail, and explain how these processes contribute to social stratification. I argue that the process of brand production, or branding, mystifies social relations in two major ways. In the first place, branding obscures historical and social relations of production; brands are presented as the face of companies in ways that displace the human faces of labor and capital. Brands can construct a sense of continuity and stability, even with the relocation of manufacturing centers transfers in ownership. Secondly, in markets that are full of numerous seemingly individual brand entities, branding obscures relationships between brands and their belonging to parent companies, masking concentrations of capital and power.

For decades, *African print* has been sold in bustling open-air markets where it is folded and stacked in neatly lined towers of color. Makola Market, the largest open-air market in Accra, holds dozens of *African print* stalls and kiosks where consumers can purchase a wide selection of *African print* patterns and brands.[232] At the point of purchase, consumers value product price, colors, motifs and patterns, as well as notions about the functionality, colorfastness, and durability of *print* textiles products. Stalls retailing *African print* range from crude wooden structures with dirt floors and corrugated roofs, to one-room shops in multistory buildings with glass display cases and security grills. While men also vend, *African print* retailing is more closely

[232] The largest cluster of vendors in Makola is adjacent to a tailoring section, enabling consumers to buy *print* textiles and easily deposit them with tailors.

associated with market women, many of whom inherited the trade from their mothers and grandmothers.

Over the years, as a marketing strategy, market women assigned names to popular *prints* that described motifs or linked patterns to local events, metaphors, popular sayings, and proverbs. Naming *prints* increases the likelihood of repeat purchasing and increases manufacturers and traders' chances of moving inventory. For decades, manufacturers in Europe depended on market women, in addition to company researchers, to determine what *print* patterns to design and reprint. Market women relayed sales knowledge to merchants and manufacturers and served as critical interlocutors speaking languages of global commerce and local culture.

Since liberalization, the practice of naming *prints* at Makola has declined; the sheer volume and high turnaround of new patterns makes it difficult or unnecessary for traders to associate patterns with names. In terms of products that 'move' in the market, 'old' patterns and named 'classics' are the most popular retail items, due to their social symbolism and cultural capital. 'New', unnamed *prints* are also popular; purchased for aesthetic rather than symbolic qualities.[233] With varied combinations of 'old' and 'new' in stock, traders appeal to consumers through the provision of a wide range of pattern choices, local and imported brands, and the construction of a particular retail 'atmosphere'.

In recent years, select *African print* brands increased investments in retail and marketing in Accra: they opened boutique shops and chain stores; expanded broadcast and print advertising; and launched new patterns and product lines with pre-assigned

[233] The exception to this is funeral *cloth* which often displays 'new' patterns with indigenous phrases and cultural symbols. *sɛ asa* the *cloth* used for President Atta Mills's funeral, is an example of funeral cloth that is named and also a relatively 'new' pattern.

names.[234] By naming patterns before their circulation in markets and creating alternatives to retail in open-air markets, manufacturers have attempted to bypass the historical role of market women in producing symbolic meaning and shaping the retail experience. Increasingly, *African print* can be purchased in air-conditioned malls and shopping plazas tended by beautiful staff using corporate sales strategies and practices. Moreover, new locations and practices of retail enable established brands to (re)present themselves to consumers in ways designed to increase consumption.

Changes in *African print* retail are linked to wider expansions in retail infrastructure across Accra. After the Accra Mall opened in 2006 at the Tetteh Quarshie interchange, other malls were launched including the West Hills Mall, which opened in 2014 and, for a time, was West Africa's largest mall.[235] Malls in Accra are funded in large part by South African interests – Atterbury Trust, Broll, and Delico Investments are among the largest – and each mall is anchored by large supermarkets such as Game, a Walmart subsidiary, or the South African supermarket, Shoprite. The construction of new cathedrals of consumption brings with it new cultures and practices of consumption: consumers learn to window shop and browse, and the mall becomes a social as well as shopping destination.[236] New consumption spaces transform Accra's urban landscapes and traffic flows, and embed mall culture deeper into national culture.[237]

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[234] Despite the efforts of manufacturers, the names of product lines have not been taken up by consumers.

[235] Located in Dukonah on the outskirts of Accra, West Hills lies in a rapidly developing middle class residential area situated off the newly constructed Cape Coast Highway on the western outskirts of Accra. It was constructed primarily by South African interests, and is jointly owned by Delico Property Development Limited and Ghana's Social Security and National Insurance Trust. The mall is anchored by South African grocery and supermarket chains Shoprite and Edgars.

[236] The food court is the epicenter of social life at the Accra Mall. The Mall's bathrooms are also used to exchange contact information and solicit sexual and platonic engagement.

[237] Traffic is an especially disconcerting problem in Accra. Establishing the Accra Mall at the Tetteh Quarshie interchange, for example, increased traffic and contributed significantly to urban congestion.

Fashion boutiques in malls retail designer *African print* clothing and accessories, as well as a variety of 'Western' fashions and designer labels. Only a few *print* textile brands pay the hefty rents required to maintain brick-and-mortar stores at malls; these are the brands investing most heavily in marketing and direct selling to consumers. Retail spaces in malls allow *African print* textiles manufacturers to more carefully craft their brand image, and to make specific associations between the qualities of branded products and middle and upper-income consumers.

At the time of fieldwork, seven brands were taking the lead in expanding the consumption frontier. Specifically, Vlisco, Woodin, and DaViva, which retail in malls; Printex which retails in roadside boutiques and open-air markets; and GTP, ATL, and Hitarget, which retail primarily in open-air markets such as Makola.[238] (See brand names and logos in Figure 6 below). Vlisco is the premium *African print* brand. Manufactured in Helmond, a southern city in the Netherlands, the Vlisco plant produces exclusively for African markets and is commonly referred to as *Dutch wax.* Vlisco connects to a long history of manufacturing, and the brand enjoys 'first mover' advantages reflected in ownership of property rights to 'classic' designs. Woodin and DaViva are manufactured in Ghana and are recognized as 'local' brands, as are GTP, ATL and Printex. Phoenix Hitarget, or Hitarget for short, manufactures in Qingdao, in China's Shandong Province. Hitarget entered the market last in relation to other leading brands. It is the most inexpensive of the leading brands and the most widely purchased brand in Ghana.[239] (Two other brands, ABC and GTMC, were among the

[238] In addition to its outlet in the Accra Mall, Woodin opened shops in the Mövenpick Ambassador Hotel, A&C Mall, and Tema Central Mall.
[239] At the time of fieldwork, the second-most popular *print* brand manufactured in China was Odin.

leading brands in decades past. They are highly regarded by some consumers but a declining number of retail outlets carry them.)

Figure 6

Leading *African print* brands in Ghana

Products manufactured by the seven leading brands are associated with varying price points, characteristics of textiles, degrees of creativity, and conferred status. As such, each brand relates to the others in an unspoken tiered hierarchy which, in descending order, places Vlisco in the top tier, GTP, ATL, and Woodin in the next tier down, DaViva and Printex in the one after that, and Hitarget at the bottom. Vlisco is the most expensive brand in the market, and carries the most social prestige. Of the

'cheap' *prints* imported from China, Hitarget is the most valued, but of the seven leading brands, Hitarget carries the least social prestige.

The two *African print* textiles shops at the Accra Mall belong to Vlisco and Woodin.[240] The stores are located across from one another at the mall's first entrance, a prime location that ensures heavy foot traffic past window displays and attractive attendants.[241] Shoppers are faced with material fantasies in the form of fashion photography, carefully manipulated mannequins, and dazzling displays of merchandise that scintillate the senses and fuel desires. Both Vlisco and Woodin use their shops to actively construct their brand identity, to set themselves apart from competitors, and to communicate meanings to consumers. Each shop is attended by young college and secondary school graduates dressed in matching uniforms. Sales staff receive on-the-job training in sales, and the restrained, standardized comportment of corporate customer service. The overdone make-up, standing at attention, politeness, and smiling at customers stands in sharp contrast to the informal, at times brusque, selling techniques of market women. Both the shops in malls and their attendants point to significant transformations in consumption in Ghana and the West African region.

By 2013, Vlisco and Woodin had opened shops at the premium business resort of Tinapa, in the Free Zone of Adiabo, Calabar, Nigeria.[242] DaViva also retailed

[240] At the time of fieldwork, busloads of shoppers from Nigeria frequented the Woodin shop, buying *prints* that couldn't be purchased at home because of the country's ban on imported textiles. The ban has since been lifted and Vlisco, Woodin, and other brands now openly retail in Nigeria.

[241] The Vlisco shop opened in 2012. Its launch was accompanied by an invitation only fashion show held in the mall parking lot, and celebrities, government officials, and fashion icons were present to inaugurate the shop. After the fashion show and an extravagant ribbon cutting, an ensemble of string players welcomed guests and press into the store and young shop attendants smiled and made enthusiastic sales pitches to potential patrons.

[242] Tinapa Resort is the 'visionary development' of former Governor of Cross River State, Donald Duke. The complex is divided into a business/commercial hub and leisure destination – the business side operates as a Free Zone for manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers; and the leisure side includes a water park, film studio (offering production and post-production services), arcade games, a food

products in Tinapa though it did not operate a shop. The Tinapa business and leisure complex was conceived as a trade and distribution hub to rival London or Dubia. Shops there sell goods duty-free, and world traders, business people, and tourists converge.[243] The Tinapa Project is a joint venture between South African and Nigerian state and private interests.

Figure 7

Vlisco sales representatives, Accra Mall, 2013

court, hotel and, of course, shopping. The complex was constructed by a team of Nigeria, Germany and South Africa companies.

[243]As the Tinapa website describes it, the complex is serving the West and Central African region which teems with "brand hungry people with increasing disposable income and a willingness to spend it." Tinapa Resort. Business: Fact & Figures. Accessed March 7, 2014. http://www.tinapa.com.ng/business/modules/news/article.php?storyid=4

In contrast to Vlisco and Woodin's investments in 'middle class' shopping infrastructure, the Chinese manufactured brand, Hitarget, continues to retail in open-air markets. Hitarget spends no money on advertising, does not invest in brick-and-mortar outlets in malls, and does not employ trained sales staff to market its products. Hitarget is sold primarily by market women who promote its durability relative to other inexpensive brands, and celebrate its low cost relative to expensive brands manufactured in Holland and Ghana. China's market power, as reflected by Hitarget, is growing in Ghana's textiles market. As Howard French (2010) notes, China is not only a new kind of power in Africa, it is strategically positioning itself in African markets to rival and circumvent Euro-American and South Africa interests.

Changes in Ghana's retail and marketing landscape involve a wholesale cultural revolution that incorporates consumer subjectivity and reorders the social terms in which individuals identify and value themselves and others. The choices consumers make about which *prints* to buy (and where to buy them) reflect contrasting (at times competing) values and meanings associated with various brands. Branding extends to consumers the same representations that describe and signify the uniqueness of the brand. By this logic, purchasing a 'classy', 'fashionable', 'trendy', 'chic', 'cool', or 'practical' brand makes the consumer 'classy', 'fashionable'; 'trendy', 'chic', 'cool', or 'practical'. Consumers buy brands and assign the brand's status and qualities to themselves – brands, not simply commodities, factor into personal and public presentation of the self. The idealized consumer buys and becomes the brand. Accordingly, consumers make deliberate choices about how much to invest in branded products, and when buying brands matters and when it does not.

Certain brands also associate themselves more closely with high status figures such as celebrities, athletes, wealthy individuals and families, and tastemakers.

Contracted celebrities endorse brands, and corporate sponsorship provides increased public visibility in a cycle entangling social and corporate interests. Celebrities and employees who tarnish the brand image, or violate codes of conduct befitting the brand, are subject to public criticism and embarrassing contract release. In these way, marketing inserts the identification and communication of needs to consumers, and attempts to induce changes in individual decision-making and (in the aggregate) produce larger cultural changes as well.

Marx's notion of 'commodity fetishism' brings awareness to how market exchange obscures social relations of production and, instead, presenting their exchange value as an intrinsic feature of their quality as commodities rather than the labor power that is perhaps the only ingredient in them. In the case of *African print*, this means that consumers relate to the seemingly intrinsic qualities of textiles – their colors, patterns, names, and uses – rather than the laborers in Ghana, Holland, or China who produced them.

Starting in North America and Europe in the 1980s, big brands transitioned from having products that bore their names, to brandishing their logos everywhere. Naomi Klein (2000) argues that for multinational corporations, marketing brand names became more important than the actual products. The rationale the corporations use is that they can exploit labor in the so-called 'third world', as long as consumers in North America and Europe like their brand images and representations. Big retail chains possess tremendous power in this system as they can threaten not to carry particular brands or products if manufacturers fail to comply with their demands.[244] In this way, corporations can actually limit consumer choice and consolidate their power.

[244] Klein (2000) also illustrates how corporations can misuse copyright law to silence criticism and moral challenges. Sundry studies illustrate how big retailers and large multinational companies can exert pressures to reduce manufacturing costs or change product content to suit corporate preferences.

Consumers, in turn, begin to make assessments about product properties, the conditions of labor and its value in terms of 'craftsmanship' and time invested in production. Provenance becomes shorthand for quality, and assessments are summarized in pithy phrases. For example, much is made of leather goods 'made in Italy', or 'German engineering', and a range of meanings associated with goods 'made in China'.

Branding and African print

Provenance and branding have been important elements of *African print* commerce from the beginning. In the 1800s, manufacturers in Europe printed company names and insignia on the selvage, the woven edge, of cloth to distinguish their products from competitors. In a related practice, *kaba* and *slit* were worn with the selvage showing at the bottom of the 'skirt' or 'blouse', revealing the brand name of the textile used to fashion the outfit. Consumers continue the practice today of displaying brand names on selvages. Similar to the ways consumers wear clothing brandishing designer labels like Louis Vuitton or Chanel, exposed selvages in *African print* clothing signal the value of one's attire. Selvages, therefore, provide information about provenance and 'quality' at the point of purchase, and continue to communicate the value of cloth when displayed in finished clothing.

In the 1800s, West African consumers developed a reputation among manufacturers in Europe for demanding sophisticated goods, and commodities had to be accommodated to African consumers' 'high quality' tastes.[245] As Gracia Clark describes it, "The African buyer then and now does not passively accept commodities."[246] While manufacturers in the Dutch and British Empires faced each

[245] Clark 2010: 208
[246] Ibid

other as competitors, specific products from both places became highly valued by West African consumers. Expensive *Dutch wax* was perceived as worthy of 'keeping' and 'passing down' as inheritance to future generations. Clark suggests that *wax print* appealed to an "elite cohort" of African consumers whose evaluations of *print* were based on associations of provenance and branding.[247]

By the end of the Twentieth Century, European merchant firms with interests in agriculture, manufacturing, and shipping dominated trade in West Africa. European merchants specialized in buying African produce at the lowest possible price, assessing product quality and consumer credit, and managing trade arrangements. In Europe, trading firms specialized in buying manufactured goods for export to Africa, specifying order quantities, and managing freight and shipping. In 1929, the merger of A&E and the Niger Company formed the United African Company (UAC), and brought under singular ownership 93 firms with over 1000 trading posts across West Africa.[248] Once consolidated, UAC operated effective oligopolistic and oligopsonistic control of regional markets, control of supply as well as buying in the market.[249] UAC was itself a subsidiary of the Anglo-Dutch companies Unilever, plc. and Unilever

[247] Clark 2010: 208

[248] David Fieldhouse's tour-de-force, Merchant Capital and Economic Decolonization (1994), provides detailed description of the United African Company's interactions with customers and suppliers in Africa and elsewhere from 1929-1987. As he explains, the formation of UAC was a "further stage in a process of amalgamation and concentration in the West African trading system which had been going on for at least fifty years" (Fieldhouse 1994:9). By this account, European domination of West African trading systems can be traced at least to 1880.

[249] Studies of colonial development in West Africa stress the importance of monopolizing European firms in suppressing the creation of indigenous manufacturing and controlling the circulation of industrial commodities. For example, the United African Company influenced the composition of consumer goods in West African markets and determined how market shares were divided between foreign firms (Howard 1978). UAC supplied European goods to West African markets until riots and protests pressured the company to move more production to West African markets (Murillo 2011).

N.V. While Unilever provided UAC with credit lines and directors rotated between companies, UAC effectively operated as an independent company.[250]

In the Gold Coast, the colonial office was restrained from enforcing trade and textiles policies, however, large British firms 'regulated' internal competition through monopoly agreements.[251] In the 1930s, monopolizing firms established a merchandise agreement group, known as the Association of West African Merchants (AWAM).[252] The association set prices on major imports to the Gold Coast and determined companies' respective market shares. Textile trade policies at the state level were unnecessary because firms regulated trade through private agreements. The colonial state protected the interests of British textiles companies by introducing legislation that protected patents on popular *cloth* patterns. This move enabled large and established firms to increase their competitive advantage and to control sizeable sections of West African textiles markets.[253]

UAC and two French firms, Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occidentale (CFAO) and Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africaine (SCOA), dominated trade across West Africa for the first half of the Twentieth Century. UAC specialized in trade, or 'merchandising', but operated interests in agriculture, mineral development, timber extraction, ocean steamers, lighterage, and river and road transportation.[254] The onset of World War II brought commodity shortages and intensified tensions between

[250] Unilever NV owned all the capital of UAC from 1939 onwards, but UAC operated until the mid-80s as an independent company from Unilever. Clearly, Lever Brothers purchased UAC to make money, not to streamline or integrate production in other parts of the company. However, the Chairman of UAC and often several of its directors were also directors of Unilever (Fieldhouse 1994:4).
[251] Howard 1978:101
[252] The association included companies like Unilever, John Holt, Compagnie Francaise de L'Afrique Occidentale (CFAO), and Société Commerciale de L'Ouest Africain (SCOA)
[253] Howard 1978:82
[254] UAC eventually merged into one of four Unilever Groups in 1987.

European firms and African workers and consumers.[255] In 1948, European imports and interests were boycotted by protesters with the slogan: "We cannot buy; your prices are too high. If you don't cut down your prices then close down your stores, and take away your goods to your own country."[256]

In response to growing resentment of expatriate firms, UAC embarked on a total overhaul of its corporate public relations.[257] Rather than adjusting prices, the company implemented 'Africanizing' policies aimed at placing greater numbers of African staff into managerial positions, and registering subsidiaries locally.[258] With Africans as the face of management, UAC presented itself as a more locally integrated company providing economic empowerment to more segments of the population. In addition, following the so-called 'Accra riots', UAC modified adverts to portray Africans in more active and assertive roles that might appeal to politicians, members of the business community, as well as more 'ordinary' consumers.[259] Importantly, UAC's rebranding after World War II occurred at the same time as transformations in marketing and media organizations; in different parts of the world there entailed a ratcheting up of efforts to "institute a culture of consumption."[260]

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[255] The colonial state interfered with the market on two noteworthy occasions: 1) immediately following World War I when German trade to the Gold Coast was prohibited; and 2) the imposition of quota-based restrictions of Japanese textiles in the thirties. German limitations can be read as punitive war sanctions, but regulation of Japanese imports appears purely aimed at market control. Imports of Japanese textiles to the Gold Coast had rapidly increased in the first years of the thirties; Japanese imports grew from 1 percent of cotton goods imported in 1932 to approximately 18 percent by 1934. Japan, however, was not a significant consumer of British exports, and could not retaliate if Britain restricted its market share in the Gold Coast. Presumably to keep profits for British monopolies high, the Colonial Office introduced the Textiles Quotas Ordinance in 1934, an act designed specifically to "restrict the annual imports only of certain textile goods manufactured in Japan" (Howard 1978:103).
[256] Murillo 2011:318
[257] Stockwell 2000: 135-138
[258] Murillo 2011: 320
[259] Ibid
[260] Firat and Dholakia 1998:19

As the UAC subsidiary came under more control of its parent company Unilever, it maintained a strong presence in Ghana by participating in establishment of textiles factories in the 1960s. Unilever was a major investor in the establishment of GTP, while interests from China supplied capital to establish the ATL brand. When output in Ghana's textile industry peaked in 1977, GTP was the leading local brand. Other important local manufacturers included ATL, Ghana Textile Manufacturing Company (GTMC), Juapong Textiles, and Printex.[261]

In the 1980s, markets opened to new players.[262] Operating economies of scale, manufacturers in China exponentially expanded their supply of products to Ghanaian markets, offering less expensive, lower-quality alternatives to *African print* products manufactured in Europe and Ghana. As the quality of *prints* manufactured in China improved, they gained wider appeal to Ghanaian consumers. Today, while still considered medium or low-quality *prints*, consumers consider products manufactured in China more colorfast and creatively designed than before. Which *African print* products and brands are 'best' is a contested question eliciting varied responses based on consumer evaluations of price, quality, brand status and prestige. To increase competitiveness, each of the leading *print* brands targets specific market segments and appeals to distinctive consumer values and identities. Despite varied consumer evaluations, a clear hierarchy of brands has emerged.

The leading brands - Vlisco, Hitarget, Woodin, GTP, DaViva, ATL, and Printex – are household names that collectively control a majority of the *African print*

[261] MOTI 2002

[262] In the 1980s, to exploit loopholes in the regulation of world trade, firms in countries such as South Korea and China established factories in African countries. In doing so, it appeared they were under-utilizing trade quota allocations, and they also gained backdoor access to lucrative EU and US markets (Amankwah-Amoah 2015:26-27).

market in Ghana.[263] One distinction generally made about the quality of leading brands is captured in the terms *big* and *small cloth*. Brands that considered *big cloth* are expensive and durable; they often produce *wax prints* as well as *roller prints*, and they confer status to the wearer. Vlisco or *Dutch wax* is consistently considered *big cloth*, and ATL and GTP are commonly recognized as *big cloth* as well. *Big cloth* is sold in twelve or six yard pieces and is seldom cut into smaller yardage. *Small cloth* refers to inexpensive brands like Hitarget and other 'cheap' brands. Consumers use *small cloth* with less regard; it is frequently retailed in one or two yard pieces and used for mass production of garments for tourists, accessories, and curios. Vlisco and Hitarget represent the top and bottom of the brand hierarchy in Ghana. If the *African print* market is separated generally into needs, wants, and tastes segments, inexpensive brands such as Hitarget satisfy needs, middle-tier brands such as Printex, DaViva, and Woodin satisfy wants, and *big cloth* or top-tier brands like GTP, ATL, and Vlisco satisfy premium demand.

The Dutch brand Vlisco retails, on average, for $85 for six yards of fabric, and customers pay additional costs to tailor uncut material into clothing. Consumers of Vlisco are also more likely to pay higher costs for tailoring, generally upwards of $15. Consequently, attire made with Vlisco fabric can easily cost more than $100. By contrast, the Chinese brand, Hitarget, retails for approximately $15 for six yards, and is often cut and sold into smaller yardage. In addition, the least expensive tailors charge the equivalent of a few dollars. As such, Hitarget articles of clothing can be

[263] Other household brands include the almost defunct GTMC, the ABC brand which is now sold with ATL products, and the popular Odin brand manufactured in China.

made for less than $15. Clearly, Hitarget is the go-to brand for value for money, and it controls approximately half of the *African print* market in Accra.[264]

The other leading brands – Woodin, GTP, ATL, DaViva, and Printex – are manufactured in Ghana, primarily in Tema (the industrial suburb of Accra) and in the city of Akosombo in the Eastern Region. These 'local' brands produce mid-quality and mid-priced *African prints*. Woodin, GTP, and ATL are marginally more expensive than DaViva and Printex, and the two clusters of brands retail between $35 and $25, respectively. Like Vlisco, these five Ghanaian brands invest in advertising and marketing, and each attempts to construct a distinct brand image and identity. [265] A closer examination of brand representations captures how marketing positions each of the leading brands, and reveals interesting relationships between seemingly competing brands.

[264] I obtained market share estimates through exit polls (138 in total), on different days, as consumers were leaving Makola Market and the Accra Mall. I asked what brands they purchased, how often, how many yards, and from which retail outlets.

[265] Interview respondents recognized them as 'local' brands, and often connected their success to Ghana's economy and development projects.

Figure 8

Brand Market Share Estimates, 2013

BRAND NAME AND LOGO	Market Share Estimate	Provenance
VLISCO SINCE 1846	20%	**'Dutch' Brand**
GTP, ATL AKOSOMBO TEXTILES LIMITED, woodin®, DaViva, Printex	30%	**'Local' Brands**
PRINTED BY PHOENIX HITARGET	50%	**'Chinese' brand**

Fetishism and Mystification: Representations and the Obfuscation of Relationships

Vlisco: The Premium Brand

Vlisco is the largest textiles company in the Netherlands. In 2012, it employed over 2,700 people and produced over 60 million yards of fabric.[266] The brand represents itself as 'The True Original' *wax print,* manufactured 'Since 1846'. Vlisco is the last remaining manufacturer from the era when European merchants and trading companies dominated West African consumer markets. In the Seventeenth Century, several European firms, including the Royal African Company, the Dutch West India Company, and the Compagnie du Senegal exercised monopolies on trade between Europe, West Africa, and the Americas. Among their exports were African captives sold into slavery, cotton, sugar, guns, and cotton fabrics known as 'Guinea cloth'. In the Nineteenth Century, European companies manufactured *wax print* textiles for export to West Africa. By the year 1930, a handful of companies dominated trade in West Africa, they included Unilever, John Holt, Compagnie Française de L'Afrique Occidentale (CFAO), and Société Commerciale de L'Ouest Africain (SCOA).

Collectively, these four companies directly and indirectly controlled almost 60 percent of the trade in British and French colonies in West Africa.[267] Another 20 percent of trade was accounted for by the next six largest trading companies, Paterson-Zochonis, G.B. Ollivant, Union Trading Company, Peyrissac, Maurel et Prom, and Vezia. Combined, these ten companies controlled 80 percent of trade between Europe, the Americas, and West Africa. The dominance of these merchant houses owed to their control of multiple subsidiaries and access to imperial capital, credit, shipping lines, and banking operations in colonies. For example, by the 1930s, UAC alone

[266] In the same year, the Vlisco Group also employed approximately 1,700 people in West and Central Africa.
[267] Kilby 1975: 488.

controlled as much as 35 to 40 percent of imports to Nigeria and the Gold Coast. As with other European firms, UAC's contractual agreements with metropolitan manufacturers provided guarantees on the supply of goods at steady prices, which enabled the company to concentrate on imports and exports, and maximize profits.[268]

Nineteenth century European imperialism and industrialization grew hand-in-hand, and enabled the conversion of resources extracted from one colonized place to industrial products for sale in other colonized places.[269] The Vlisco brand is linked to this legacy through Dutch colonialism in Java and the expansion of mercantilist interests in West Africa Vlisco consumers seldom mention the historical connections of *Dutch wax* to Indonesia, even when purchasing the so-called *Java prints* and product lines. Instead, brand marketing presents the tagline 'Vlisco Since 1846' as a marker of brand longevity and longstanding expertise. (See Appendix C for timeline of *Dutch wax* interests in West Africa).

In the 1960s, demand for *Dutch wax* expanded as African purchasing power grew with increased extraction of raw materials grows, and nationalist leaders called for citizens to wear 'traditional' as opposed to 'Western' attire. Ironically, *Dutch wax* was incorporated into independence movements as a symbol of 'African' freedom. In 1970, Van Vlissigen & Co. was acquired by Gamma Holdings, and the Vlisco brand name was created.

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[268] Kilby 1975:491.

[269] As early as the 1850s, textiles manufacturers from Lancashire were exploring Africa's potential to grow and supply Britain with a steady stream of cotton (Ratcliffe 1982: 98). R.D. Ross, the English commissioner to the Gold Coast between 1856 and 1859, suggested that the region north of Ashanti was "capable of furnishing…an unlimited supply of cotton" to manufacturers in Manchester (Ratcliffe 1982:96). These types of forecasts fueled myths about the magnanimous cotton-producing potential of West Africa and factored into efforts to channel raw materials from Africa to Europe. The Scramble for Africa in 1884 and 1885 was a competition between imperial powers for mineral resources, strategic naval posts and trading pathways, as well as an effort to secure supplies and consumer markets for industrial products.

For the majority of its time in operation, consumers have tracked Vlisco's products using variations of the term '*Dutch wax';* the 'Vlisco' brand name was only popularized in the 1980s.[270] Over the years, *Dutch wax* developed a reputation among West African consumers as a colorfast and durable. As a status symbol, Vlisco indicates that one has 'arrived' in a financially secure position, or saved enough to invest in high-end products. Although the brand sells a host of unnamed designs and patterns, named 'classics' are the mainstay of Vlisco's sales in the region. Importantly, Vlisco owns rights to the most popular *prints* in Ghana, including *Angelina*, *nsuo bura,* and *ABC*.

Beginning in the early 2000s, new market players imitated Vlisco's classic designs and printed them in unconventional color palettes. Because of competition from counterfeit, inexpensive, and aesthetically comparable *prints,* Vlisco's sales plummeted. In 2006, the brand responded by launching an aggressive re-branding campaign to represent itself as a luxury fashion house. Sponsoring fashion shows across West and Central Africa and releasing quarterly 'collections', 'lookbooks', billboards and other advertising products, Vlisco began to promote old and new designs as the products of a high-end fashion brand. Strategies for increasing brand awareness now include releasing new products, such as *print* scarves and bags, at high profile international fashion events like Milan Fashion Week.[271] In Accra, billboards announce to consumers the brand's fashion turn.[272]

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[270] Competition from another Dutch manufacturer provided the impetus to promote the Vlisco name.
[271] Vlisco showed at Milan Fashion Week 2013 and numerous fashion events in fashion capitals on the African continent such as Cape Town, Lagos, and Accra. Showing in cities more widely recognized as fashion capitals – namely Paris, Milan, London, New York, Barcelona, and Berlin – is a major aspiration of African brands and designers.
[272] www.businessoffashion.com/articles/global-currents/vlisco-the-african-fashion-titan-from-holland , accessed 3/29/2015

Figure 9 ***Vlisco billboard in Accra, 2013***

The photograph above captures a Vlisco billboard outside the Moevenpick Hotel in the heart of Accra, it demonstrates how the feeling of 'high fashion' is created and embodied by black models in striking poses. The Vlisco woman portrayed in advertisements is elegant, fashion-forward, bold, and confident; she wears capes and high-collar jackets, voluminous skirts, and exquisitely fitted dresses. To further embody the idealized Vlisco woman, Vlisco selects and, occasionally, clothes 'brand ambassadors' across West Africa. Women who win the opportunity to represent Vlisco are successful traders, CEOs of companies, acclaimed musicians, politicians, celebrities; they are inspirational and influential figures whose confer status on the Vlisco brand.

GTP: Ghana Textiles Printing

Production of GTP began at the Tex Styles factory in Tema in March 1963 as part of the national push for import substitution industrialization.[273] Initially, ownership of the factory was shared between the Government of Ghana, Gamma Holding NV and Unilever NV.[274] In 1966, GTP was incorporated as Ghana Textiles Printing Company and, shortly thereafter, management of the factory was taken over by the Unilever and Anglo-Dutch African Textiles Investigation Group (ADATIG). In 1976, the Government of Ghana acquired majority equity (55%) before assuming even greater control after Rawlings' coup in 1981.

Against the backdrop of Rawlings' 'Revolution', workers (successfully) agitated for the removal of Unilever management and the disenfranchisement of offshore shareholders. From 1982 to 1992, the state managed the GTP factory and withheld the rights of offshore shareholders. In response, Unilever and Gamma Holding NV withdrew investments, which led to declines in production and a temporary halt in output.[275] In 1994, as state hostility to capital lessened, Unilever resumed management control of GTP and Gamma Holding made large cash and equipment investments in Ghana Textiles Printing Company.

In 1996, Ghana Textiles Printing Company was incorporated as Tex Styles Ghana with Unilever and Gamma Holding NV holding equal majority shares of 31.27%. One year later, Gamma Holding NV became the majority shareholder at 54%, and assumed full management of the factory. In 1997, Unilever divested its

[273] The GTP factory was originally established as a joint partnership between Ghana's Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and two British firms, Messers Alexander Drew and Sons Limited and Mrs. Dodwell Company Limited.
[274] Gamma Holding NV is a company headquartered in the Netherlands and engaged in the development, manufacture, and sale of textile-based products around the world.
[275] Shareholder rights were restored in 1992.

remaining shares, leaving Gamma Holdings with 71% of the company, the Government of Ghana maintained 16% and an interest called Truebrook acquired 13%. Factory production increased and hit peak output and sales figures in the year 2000, before declining in the face of competitive imports.

Today, two companies manage operations of GTP: Tex Styles Ghana Limited and Premium African Textiles Company Limited. In 2008, GTP was the leader in *African print* manufacturing in Ghana, and it recorded over $38 million in sales, and over 19 million yards in volume.[276] In 2010, the factory was acquired by British private equity firm, Actis LLP, but operations continues under TexStyles and Premium African Textiles Company.

GTP produces four distinctive product lines to meet the demand of differentiated consumer segments: *Nsroma*, *NuStyle, Adepa*, and *Safoa*. Each line caters to a specific demographic or market segments, and consumers make meaning out of both the GTP brand and its differentiated product lines. According to a vision board in the GTP design room, the NU Style product line is 'versatile', 'vibrant', 'fun-loving', 'creative', designed for youthful consumers, with a flair for bright colors and vivid designs. *Nsroma, Adepa* and *Safoa* target more mature consumers, and feature darker, more somber color tones.

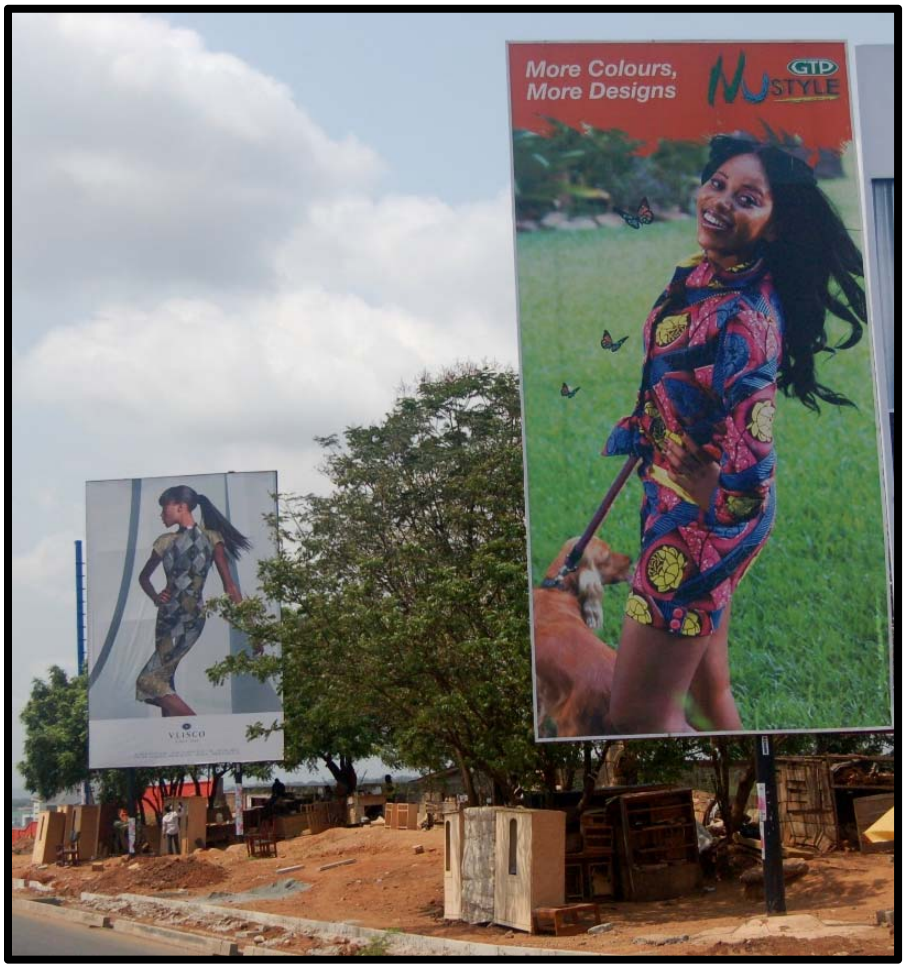
GTP's investments in marketing include sponsoring television broadcasters, dressing celebrities, and promoting fashion shows and beauty pageants. In addition, the brand invests in radio, television, billboard and print advertising.[277] The GTP billboard below illustrates the bright NuStyle color palette, as well as the ways fashion marketing attempts to remake the middle classes. The billboard depicts a model

[276] Vlisco Group Annual Report 2008.
[277] In 1996 GTP was awarded the best marketing company by the Chartered Institute of Marketers in Ghana. At the time of fieldwork, the GTP brand was acknowledged again for its leadership in Ghana's field of marketing.

looking over her shoulder with her hand on her hip and a smile on her face; she is walking a dog on a leash and wearing a two-piece NuStyle ensemble. The practice of women walking dogs in Accra is out of place, it seldom happens. The billboard is selling a fantasy rooted in Euro-American consumption norms and presenting them as symbols of fashion, fun, and middle class-ness.

Figure 10

GTP NuStyle and Vlisco billboards, Spintex Road, 2012



Immediately behind GTP's billboard is a Vlisco advertisement. The model shown stands in a more 'artistic' pose, a hand, again, on the hip, and body language suggesting strength and confidence, and grace and femininity. The two GTP and Vlisco billboards were located alongside the busy Spintex Road, positioned strategically to catch the attention of large volumes of motorists and passengers. For consumers in private and public transportation, the billboards combine to reinforce messages about how to appear fashion-forward, 'middle class', feminine, and confident. The billboards reproduce status ascribed to beautiful, slender women with long hair (presumably wigs or weaves), striking 'strong' fashion poses, and wearing flattering, fitted, branded clothing.

Woodin

With over five shops in Accra, the Woodin brand possesses the most 'middle class' shopping options for purchasing *African print* textiles in the city. The brand also boasts the most significant brick-and-mortar retail presence across West Africa, with stores in eight African countries in stores that, the Woodin website claims, are 'social hubs' for consumers to shop in 'comfort and style'.[278] Woodin describes itself as a 'pioneer' in African fashion and a 'truly African Brand' focused on 'fast fashion', meaning regular, rapid output of new fabric designs. It claims over 30 years of expertise in fashion design, and uses the tag line, 'Woodin Le Créateur'.

During my fieldwork in 2013, Woodin launched the 'Woodin Nation' campaign, which appealed to an unspecified patriotic element amongst consumers. The Woodin Nation promotes a casual look that promotes Vlisco's prêt-à-porter lines

[278] http://www.woodinfashion.com/brand/, accessed March 14, 2016.

and accessories. While custom-tailored clothing is the norm for *African print* garment production in Ghana, Woodin leads the charge in ready-to-wear clothing.

Vlisco, Woodin, and GTP lead the way in corporate sponsorship. Vlisco sponsors a range of fashion shows, and GTP NuStyle supplies fabric for the 'Ghana's Most Beautiful' contest. GTP also provides annual 'Distributor of the Year' awards. Public accolades and award ceremonies increase brand visibility and further entangle the success of the brand with the success of influential women.[279]

Figure 11

Woodin billboard, Ring Road, 2012

[279] In 2015, for example, GTP awarded Queen Mother of Effiduase the Distributor of the Year Award. In so doing, the success of GTP is linked to regional and cultural power players.

Printex

Printex is manufactured in Ghana, owned by Lebanese interests, and managed predominantly by Indian and other expatriate staff. It is a standalone brand in the sense that it doesn't belong to a larger brand family or conglomerate. Of the local brands, Printex invests the least in advertising, and opened its first retail space in 2014. Printex advertising appeals more to local cultural needs, as reflected in its use of Twi in marketing; the brand's tagline, 'Maaso mɛ shɛ bi', translates loosely to 'I, too, would wear it'. Of the seven leading brands, Printex has the only tagline that is not in a European language. Printex also appeals to local culture in provisioning for Friday Wear. Perhaps because of its relative affordability or relatively easy accessibility to the centrally located factory on Spintex Road, Printex produces a majority of the small-batch orders commissioned by wealthy individuals, and institutions and businesses.

Figure 12 ***Printex billboard, Spintex Road, 2013***

ATL, ABC, and DaViva

ATL, or Akosombo Textiles Limited, was founded in 1967 in the town of Akosombo in Eastern Region, where it continues operations today. The plant operates weaving, spinning, and finishing facilities that primarily supply the local market. Along with GTP it is the 'Ghanaian' brand accorded the highest status. In addition to beautiful *wax* and *roller prints* that attract consumers for their aesthetic qualities, ATL products cater to life events such as funerals, weddings, out-dooring ceremonies etc.

In recent years ATL has increased investments in billboard marketing, broadcast advertising, and corporate sponsorship. In an advert introducing the 'ATL Corporate Collection', an office scene is depicted with men and women around a large oval table. The cast includes a white man wearing an *print* tie (presumably made from ATL fabric), a black man wearing *ofra ntoma,* another in a *print* business shirt and another in a *print* kaftan. The women are wearing *print* dresses and blazers. The scene depicts diverse ways *African print*, or ATL more specifically, can be worn in a corporate setting. In addition, ATL dresses presenters on nightly news shows and popular broadcast media programs; they sponsor fashion shows and beauty pageants – such as the annual 'Miss Ghana' competition – as well as events outside fashion such as the Akosombo football team.[280]

In addition to ATL, the factory in Akosombo produces the ABC and DaViva brands. ABC was previously manufactured in Manchester, and was acquired by ATL in 2005.[281] ABC carries historical brand-name recognition but is the smallest part of the ATL portfolio. On the other hand, DaViva is a growing brand targeting younger

[280] Other prominent corporate sponsors for 'cultural' events are mobile phone giants MTN and Vodafone, Indomie, the Coca-Cola Company, Nestle, and Diageo's multiple brands.
[281] In the mid-1960s, the Manchester-based ABC Wax exported an estimated 20 million yards of fabric to West Africa each year

consumers. DaViva billboards are a common feature in Accra, and the brand invests in the production of standardized, prêt-à-porter clothing.

Hitarget

Hitarget is manufactured in mainland China, in the city of Qingdoa in Shandong province. The brand is owned by Qingdao Phoenix Printing & Dyeing, a holding company that operates several textiles printing and dyeing mills, and exports *African print* textiles to 20 countries in Africa and Europe. In Ghana, the brand retails in open-air markets, stalls and shipping containers converted to informal shops on the side of the street. In addition, Hitarget is the most popular brand carried by street hawkers who travel through commercial and residential neighborhoods with textiles stacked carefully on their heads and draped over their shoulders. The reputation of Hitarget is bolstered by consumer word-of-mouth. In addition, a range of fashion designers and crafts producers (especially those making products for export and tourists) use Hitarget because of its affordable array of colors and patterns.

Brand Relationships

A closer look at these seven brands reveals interesting interconnections. The Vlisco Group comprises Vlisco, Woodin, GTP, and the Ivorian brand, Uniwax; the group was owned by Gamma Holding until 2010 when it was sold to British private equity firm Actis. ATL and DaViva are owned by Hong Kong based CHA Textiles Group, which also owns the previously popular ABC brand. Printex on its own does not carry the economic and cultural capital of these brand families. Consequently, in addition to seeing how the market is shaped by the seven leading brands, we also see how the

market is constituted by three central power blocs – Hitarget, the Vlisco Group, and CHA textiles.

CHA Textiles Group

ATL, DaViva, and ABC belong to the Chinese conglomerate, the Cha Textiles Group. In addition to its factories in Ghana, Cha Textiles owns manufacturing operations in Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Côte d'Ivoire. The location of production and the names of Cha Textiles operations – such as Akosombo Textiles Limited, Zamfara Textiles, United Nigerian Textiles, etc. – give the impression of 'local' brands, yet they belong to Chinese capital.

In addition, CHA Textiles owns factories in Haining city in Zhejiang, Zhongshan in Guangdong Province, and Hong Kong that manufacture for African and other markets. Estimates suggest the company employs approximately 19,000 employees through its dyeing and printing operations. Additionally, over 6,000 workers operate Cha Textiles yarn and fabric factories, and spandex and chemical manufacturing facilities in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Provinces in mainland China. The total numbers of CHA textiles workers exceed the total number of factory workers employed in Ghana at the peak of industrial efforts. CHA Textiles exports supply markets in China, Japan, and multiple African countries, and certain subsidiaries of the Group rank among the '100 Star Overseas Enterprises' in China.[282]

The Vlisco Group

The Vlisco Group is a conglomerate including Vlisco, Woodin, GTP and a brand manufactured in Côte d'Ivoire called Uniwax. Each brand is operated by incorporated

[282] CHA Textiles website. www.chatextiles.com Accessed December 4, 2015.

companies and the four are collectively advministered by the 'Exotic Fabrics' business unit of Gamma Holding. In 2010, the Vlisco Group was purchased from Gamma Holding by a British private equity firm called Actis for $151 million. Actis managaes a portfolio of 68 companies in so-called 'emerging markets'. The firm's investment capital portfolio is approximately $6.5 billion, connected to the employment of over 114,000 people. [283] Their investment model is to take "successful local brands and build them into world-class companies."[284] Vlisco, GTP, Woodin, and Uniwax belong to this highly capitalized, powerful firm. Multiple brands funnel capital to a few coffers, and decision-makers in parent companies and conglomerates wield tremendous power to organize flows of products, people, images and events.

The complex relationships of brands and capital are not immediately visible in markets. Instead, the unique images and identities of each *African print* brand appear to consumers as individual entities offering an array of competing products. As such, consumers are generally unaware or confused about brand relations. A man wearing an *African print* button-up and matching pants explained: "I know GTP, I know GTMC. These were the traditional fabric textiles industries…Now they have a variety of products, so people even get to know them by the products. And then Akosombo Textiles also is there. And Akosombo they have what they call DaDiva, the whatever, the Super, they have different types." Consumers relate most directly to product characteristics – colors, patterns, durability etc. – and brands representations of luxury, fashion, traditions etc.

Interestingly, none of the owners of the leading *Africa print* brands in Ghana are Ghanaian, not even of the so-called 'local' brands. Ghanaian capital is not only

[283] Actis website, March 4, 2015
[284] Ibid

absent in this consumer market, but it also unlikely to emerge because Ghanaian capital cannot compete with highly capitalized global firms and giant conglomerates. British, Chinese and Lebanese interests own the dominant 'local' brand. This contradicts or at least complicates consumers' perceptions of 'local' brands, and the ways brands are embodied by black models in billboards, and Ghanaian retailers in markets and shops. The social meanings of brands – both in the minds of consumers and the ways brands are represented through advertising and marketing – are very different from the reality of 'foreign' or global ownership. Branding makes global capital invisible, and obscures the face of capital.

When I revealed relationships between brands and global capital to consumers in Accra some expressed disbelief, disappointment, and a desire to return to the days of protectionist state policies. As one respondent put it, "Why are we here in Ghana wearing something to make the Chinese rich? If ATL is not for Ghana then they should just close the whole factory." Other respondents were less passionate, some had no concerns about who owned brands, as long as they could experience and enjoy *African print* consumption and dress cultures.

Conclusion

We live in a world that is increasingly populated by branded objects and related advertising that make us, as potential consumers, recognize and relate to individual brands and their products thereby branding ourselves. Brands appear to consumers as entities with their own distinct properties and personalities, and the abundance of seemingly different branded products in consumer markets gives the impression of both choice and competition. However, *African print* markets reveal that many of the leading brands are subsidiaries of larger multinational companies or conglomerates,

and a few highly capitalized companies own a majority of the brands. When viewed together, brand families represent tremendous concentrations of capital and power. Not only are parent companies and conglomerates invisible to consumers when looking at branded commodities, investors and owners of capital are also invisible. What does this market structure mean about neoliberal competition? What does it mean for consumer choice?

Neoliberal markets intensify branding and marketing which in turn mystifies social relations, obfuscates market-mediated social stratification, and the centralization and concentration of capital in textiles markets. For those who are familiar with the relationships of consumer brands to parent companies, there is no surprise here. However, many people are unaware of these relationships. Even when there is an abstract understanding of the fact that many brands are owned by the same multinational corporations, many consumers are unaware of which exact brands belong to which firms and the extent of concentration.

To give one example, Coca-Cola is a global brand recognized and loved the world over. However, most Coca-Cola consumers are unaware of who the company's major shareholders are, or that about a third of the brand is owned by its top 5 shareholders. Berkshire Hathaway is Coca-Cola's biggest shareholder, at 15%, and Berkshire Hathaway owns popular subsidiary companies and brands such as Geico, Heinz, Fruit of the Loom, Dairy Queen and very many others.[285] The relationships of these brands to each other is invisible to consumers who relate directly to branded products rather than shareholders. Branding, I argue, mystifies or obfuscates social relations of ownership and concentrations of capital. There are of course notable exceptions – Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates – certain owners are the faces of their firms.

[285] Berkshire Hathaway is the multinational conglomerate spearheaded by business magnate, CEO, and philanthropist, Warren Buffet.

In relation to *African print* markets in Ghana*,* this observation directs us to ask questions about the individuals that own leading brands. Who are the individuals that control capital? Where are they located? How do they use their power and influence? In the case of *African print,* management and shareholders of leadings brands are mostly far-off and faceless.[286]

Attention to *African print* brand families can help explain market structures and transformations. For example, when the Vlisco Group is viewed as a family of brands linked to the $6.5 billion investment capital portfolio of Actis, it is easier to explain why, or how, Vlisco, GTP and Woodin are expanding their advertising and retail presence in Accra. These brands clearly invest most in billboards and corporate shopping spaces and, collectively, are at the forefront of material and cultural transformations in *African print* advertising and retail. Their brands are embodied by models, retailers and brand ambassadors, whose representations in turn shape how the brands are valued, and influence conceptions of fashion, beauty, and style. While the big capital behind Actis has big influence, the individuals behind capital remain unknown.

[286] One notable exception is that textiles representatives, mostly mid-level managers, are present at fashion shows and other corporate sponsored events.

CHAPTER 5

THE VALUE OF VLISCO:
REMAKING THE BRAND AND THE SOCIAL THROUGH 'DISTANCE'

Value of Vlisco

In the early 2000s, as textiles manufactured in Asia, particularly in China, flooded West African markets they pushed more expensive and less competitive *African print* companies into financial crisis.[287] Vlisco was no exception. From 2002 to 2003, Vlisco's returns fell from 176 to 105 million Euros, and traders retailing Vlisco in West and Central Africa saw their returns fall by seventy percent. [288] The expansion of 'cheap' market entrants posed an existential 'threat' to Vlisco. In response to plummeting sales, Vlisco launched a comprehensive campaign to rebrand itself as a fashion house in 2006.

Transforming from a textiles "plant with a brand to a brand with a plant," Vlisco made marketing its core strategy for increasing sales and competitiveness, and creating reliable consumers. Branding as a fashion house required expanded investments in a wide set of mechanisms to grow brand visibility. Advertisements ran on billboards, television, radio, and online and print fashion media. Vlisco sponsored fashion events that associated the brand with established and up-and-coming players in international and local fashion industries. In addition, Vlisco constructed 'flagship' shops in shopping malls and employed attractive young sales people to perform corporate retailing services. Collectively, the brand's 'high fashion' marketing and

[287] As I argue in Chapter 3, the implementation of a 'Traditional Fridays' policy in Ghana contributes to increased African print consumption, as does growing interest in African print fashion, which will be discussed below. China is the largest but far from the only Asian country manufacturing *African print*. Other manufacturing countries are South Korea, Indonesia, India, Thailand and Bangladesh.
[288]Hoogenboom et al. 2007. This decline represented a dip in sales of nearly 50 million yards.

luxury retail spaces celebrate African women, the creativity of Dutch craftsmanship, and the love affair between the two.

In this chapter, I examine the remaking of Vlisco as a fashion house, and related entanglements of 'Dutch' and 'African' representations. I start by describing the historical value of Vlisco in Ghana, and explain its (declining) symbolic value and market position. I provide a brief overview of the changing context of 'African fashion' to indicate why Vlisco chose to invest in high fashion. In the final section, I examine Vlisco's high fashion marketing and retailing strategies, and analyze *distancing* strategies and implications.

I argue that high fashion branding literally and figuratively *distances* Vlisco from 'cheap' alternatives. By establishing consumption spaces in malls, Vlisco contributes to the separating of middle and upper classes from spaces and people in the informal economy. Additionally, I observe that Vlisco's marketing narratives elevate Dutch 'discovery' and 'originality' in ways that reproduce imperial representations and erasures; Dutch achievements are centered at the same time as Dutch appropriation and colonialism are omitted. Lastly, I suggest Vlisco's fashion marketing produces material and symbolic shifts from the historical valuations and influences of 'mommies', to players in the field of high fashion as well as everyday 'fashionistas'.

Vlisco is the last large manufacturer of *African print* textiles in Europe.[289] The brand is known variably in Ghana as '*Dutch wax*', '*Holland'*, or '*Dumas',* and is the most expensive *cloth* in the market. [290] Dutch provisioning of *print* textiles dates back

[289] (In some respects, the experience of *African print* deindustrialization in Ghana has interesting parallels with *African print* deindustrialization in England and Holland. High volumes of production have, in general, relocated to South East Asia.)

[290] '*Dumas*' is a less common appellation for *Dutch wax,* and it is unconfirmed how the name came about. A textiles expert in Accra suggested that the name is derived from a colonial officer whose last

to the middle of the Nineteenth Century. Since then, *Dutch wax* has emerged as a high 'quality', premium product beloved by African consumers.[291] (See Appendix C for a timeline of *Dutch wax* and the Vlisco brand). Across West and Central Africa, Vlisco stands as symbol of 'distinction' and good judgment of 'taste'. Historically, *Dutch wax* has been retailed in open-air markets, primarily by women traders. During fieldwork, six yards of Vlisco retailed for between 130-170 cedis, approximately $65-$85.[292]

Owing to its high price and 'quality', Vlisco imitations abound. Counterfeits range from replicas of copyrighted designs to brazen reproductions of the Vlisco label. As a strategy to stem fakery, Vlisco began to print the brand name, insignia, and identification as '*real Dutch wax*' on the selvage of finished fabric.[293] Inseparable from the rest of the material, selvages provide an effective way for *African print* producers and consumers to identify the manufacturing origins of cloth without needing to completely unfold and inspect the fabric or break the manufacturer's seal. Words and symbols printed or woven into the selvage serve as "copyright" markers, and while imitation is possible, selvages cannot be removed without damage to the cloth.[294]

Gracia Clark (2010) suggests that the practice of companies identifying themselves on selvages provides an effective way for *African print* producers to build

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name was Dumas and who was influential in the circulation of wax print textiles in the Gold Coast (Warritay fieldnotes 2013).

[291] See Karin Junger's documentary, *Mama Benz and the Taste of Money* (2002). Junger highlights the negotiations of businesswomen and traders with men representing Vlisco's corporate interests, and demonstrates how businesswomen leverage their understanding of local markets and social influence.

[292] Variation in price reflects the types of products in Vlisco's line which include roller printed 'Java print', 'wax print', and 'super wax', all of which differ in weight and printing techniques.

[293] Selvages are typically woven with extra threads and a tighter weave from the rest of the cloth to ensure the edges stay straight and firm.

[294] Clark 2010:199.

a brand identity and develop relationships with distant consumers.[295] Clark argues that printed words on selvages are recognizable to both illiterate and literate buyers, and enable quick assessment of similar-looking products.[296] To consumers in Ghana, '*real Dutch wax'* on the selvage signifies colorfastness, creative designs, and durable cotton fabric – all of which seemingly justify high product prices. Vlisco traders and consumers take pride in the ability to discern 'real' from 'fake' *prints* and, in so doing, demonstrate cultural competence.

Until recently, *Dutch wax* carried more meaning than the label 'Vlisco'. In fact, the Vlisco name was created in 1970 when Van Vlissengen & Co. was incorporated into Gamma Holdings. In the eighties, the 'Vlisco' name was used more intentionally because another Dutch company began manufacturing *Dutch wax*.[297] Vlisco added the words 'original', 'genuine' and 'real' to its selvages and product labels to further distinguish itself from competitors and counterfeits.[298] Discursively representing the brand as 'real' or 'original' gives Vlisco full rights to Dutch provenance; it discredits imitators; and associates the origins of *wax print* with the Netherlands.

Despite the relatively recent circulation of the brand name, the tag line often used is, 'Vlisco since 1846'. Claiming establishment in 1846 conjures the idea of Vlisco as a brand with longstanding manufacturing expertise, enduring quality, and trustworthiness.[299] The tag line adds legacy to the brand's reputation for quality. [300]

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[295] Clark 2010:199.
[296] Ibid
[297] Arts 2012:10
[298] Imitation has been an ongoing problem for Vlisco, when the company was still P.F. van Vlissingen & Co., competitors regularly usurped the company's good reputation and sold their products under the company's name. (Arts 2012)
[299] 'Vlisco since 1846' is typically featured on the brand's marketing materials and labels.
[300] It is also possible to read 'Vlisco since 1846' as a call to consumers to be keepers of history. Consumers essentially perform a cultural duty when they purchase Vlisco because they preserve an old brand with longstanding cultural connections. The value of keeping Vlisco's history and, by

Social meanings add even more value. In the past, uncut pieces of *Dutch wax* were passed down from mothers to daughters as heirlooms and, when necessary, families re-sold *Dutch wax* 'inheritance' for cash. Accordingly, buying *Dutch wax* was not simply a display of wealth but an investment of social and literal currency. Moreover, the durability of *Dutch wax* meant that a single piece could be used every day, or occasionally, for many years without tearing or fading. The value of Vlisco is that it lasts and, as one respondent put it, "It is better to have one good thing than many bad ones."

When purchased regularly by wealthy individuals, Vlisco signals affluence and status. For middle- and lower-income consumers, purchasing *Dutch wax* is an occasion. In order to purchase *Dutch wax,* individuals and families save for months or make payments to market traders in installments. Around significant cultural and life events, social pressures mount to buy Vlisco, even when such a purchase might be financially burdensome or impractical. In Akan weddings, for example, the bride's family expects to receive six pieces of cloth from the groom's family. Presenting six pieces of *Dutch wax* makes more of a 'statement' about the financial capacity of the groom's family to care for the bride.[301]

Outside of special occasions, *wax print* in Ghana was the mainstay of middle-aged women whose textiles consumption signaled their 'arrival' at a financially mature place. For decades, Dutch manufacturers designed color schemes and patterns specifically for this niche market of 'mommies'. Admittedly, *Dutch wax* was also worn over the years by young, financially-precarious, and male consumers, however, in Ghana, it was most associated with mature, financially-able 'mommies'.

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implication, African cultural heritage, is threatened by the wave of cheap Chinese products that carry no historical narrative, and appeal instead to consumer thrift.

[301] The practice of giving the bride's family cloth persists today, however, it is more likely that the majority of gifted cloths will be made in China with perhaps one or two Holland pieces.

Mommies range from market women to professionals and homemakers, kept mistresses and madams; their ability to buy and wear Vlisco does not map neatly onto levels of education, literacy, religion or ethnicity. Across multiple cultural categories, regularly wearing *Dutch wax* signals solid economic standing, or as an elderly woman explained, it communicates that a woman is "really someone in society." As such, Vlisco serves as an important status symbol, highly culturally and socially value.

In retail, Vlisco also holds a unique position. To meet consumer demand, retailers in open-air markets regularly cut mid-ranged and inexpensive *print* textiles into three-, two- or even one-yard pieces, but they refuse to cut Vlisco. Vlisco is only sold in half or full pieces, six and twelve yards respectively. The logic is two-fold: For one, retailers want to avoid incurring high losses from leftover yards of unsold *Dutch wax.*[302] Secondly, the potential for consumers to recommodify Dutch cloth is diminished if cut into smaller yardage. Unsold pieces of 'cheap' *African print* brands represent less of a financial loss for retailers and, because their colors fade and fabric wears thin, there is less expectation that 'cheap' prints will be recommodified.

In Makola Market, Vlisco is sold in brick-and-mortar shops as well as informal market stalls.[303] The more formal shops are located at the edges of the market and along the parking lot of Rawlings Square; they are mostly one-room structures with tiled floors, brand posters, and promotional materials hanging on doors and windows. *Print* textiles are displayed in glass cases, on rotating display stands, and in tall columns lining shop walls. In these well-lit shops, two or more attendants offer 'serious' buyers the latest *African print* styles from '*big cloth*' brands such as Vlisco,

[302] By contrast, African prints manufactured in China are so cheap that unsold yards are less of a financial loss than several yards of Vlisco would be.
[303] The Vlisco Group includes affiliated brands GTP and Woodin (produced in Ghana) and Uniwax (produced in Ivory Coast). Shops in the market with large GTP signs typically also sell Vlisco.

GTP, and ATL. In fact, many shops at the market are direct distributors with credit lines and wholesale contracts with the big brands.

By contrast, market stalls are typically 'shabby' wooden structures located on the sides of bustling streets and deep in the pulsing heart of the market. All manner of *print* products are sold in stalls – leading and obscure brands, as well as 'cheap' imitations and counterfeits. Even the smallest stalls carry dozens of *print* textiles folded neatly and stacked high in dazzling displays of patterns and colors. Morning is the busiest time for *cloth* business in the market, and by early afternoon market women are withered, alternating lackadaisically between naps and half-hearted appeals to passing shoppers. Consumers do not idle in the market; they walk with purpose and move vigilantly. To shop in the market requires enduring scorching heat, navigating pedestrian and vehicular traffic, sidestepping beggars, being accustomed to offensive smells, deflecting the insistence of hawkers, and responding with agility to the urgent command of "*AGOO!"*[304] Vlisco's decision to rebrand as a fashion house seeks, intentionally, to move away from this retail experience.

Subjects and Objects of African Print Fashion

In 2006, on the recommendation of consultants from the brand advisory bureau BrandWatch, Vlisco executives decided to rebrand as an "international luxury high end fashion brand."[305] Commenting on the strategy, Vlisco sales manager Ed Hessing remarked:

> "For the price of a yard of Vlisco, you can buy eight to ten copies…The competition from China is a threat…We must defend ourselves against dirt-cheap Chinese copies….We aim to become the top high-end fashion brand of

[304] *Agoo* translates loosely to 'excuse me' with the urgent implication of 'get out of the way fast'.
[305] Vlisco PowerPoint presentation at Accra store opening November 1, 2012 (Warritay fieldnotes)

> Africa...taking [Vlisco] from a textiles plant with a brand to a brand with a plant."[306]

Before examining details of Vlisco's rebranding in the new market, a brief review of 'fashion', more generally, helps to provide necessary context. For a long time, feminists criticized fashion for its links to sexual display and the reproduction of heterosexist paradigms. In relation to the female body, fashion and beauty industries were denounced for their commodification of the body (Corbett, 2000), and problematic constructions of femininity reproduced through self-conscious regulation and relations of the body (Wilson 1985; Craik 1994; Church-Gibson 2000). Fashion grooming and adornment remake hair, skin, nails, eyelashes, and specific 'parts' of the body (Doane 1987:32). By enhancing, masking, trimming and transforming, fashion can remake the self, as captured in the phrase 'makeover'.

Contemporary scholarship engages seriously with the field of fashion (Entwistle 2015 [2000], Crewe 2001). A major thread of critical research relates to how fashion media, especially fashion photography, disseminates stereotypes and myths about the perfect female body, often represented as young, slender, and 'conventionally' beautiful (Gamman, 2000, Grogan, 1999). Fashion representations exclude big, unruly, and irregular bodies; they reproduce a limited set of cultural norms about the range of existing bodies, beauty, and fashion. The construction of fashion-fit bodies is an expression of the wider shift from social to cultural history, from material to symbolic structures, and from a focus on ostensibly pre-constituted subjects to the constitutions of new subjectivities.

Fashion is preoccupied with change, and striking aesthetics; it is the realm of clothing characterized by artistic expression and self-conscious representation. To be

[306] AFP "In "Africa Wax" war, Dutch take on China" (AFP) – Apr 11, 2009

'in fashion' requires an obsession with novelty and creativity. Fashion enables articulation of individual style (a 'point of view' or 'worldview'), as well as signs of group membership (identity) and difference. Historically, colonial and Eurocentric common sense overlooked and denied 'African' fashion, and represented African dress as static 'traditional' 'costume'. Relegating African dress to 'costume' forecloses our ability to see African fashion systems, and maintains associations of 'fashion' with European modernity.

Joanne Entwistle (2015 [2000]) expresses the popular perspective that the "term 'fashion' carries with it the more specific meaning of a system of dress that is found in western modernity."[307] Recent scholarship makes clear what modernity does not belong to the 'West'. Rather, modernity emerged through the 'connected histories' (Bhambra, 2007) and experiences of conquest, enslavement, colonial encounter and exchange. Understanding modernity as a set of 'connected histories' precludes fashion existing as an exclusively Western system. Western fashion systems emerged in the context of uneven power relations and exchange of sartorial practices and styles around the world. Imperial relations of trade, colonial exploitation of labor and appropriation of culture are integral parts of the histories and structures of Western fashion.[308]

In fashion systems around the world, both internal and external influences come to bear. Sartorial practices and cultural dress aesthetics are created in place and through inspiration from distant others. Fashions change with transformations of local

[307] See Entwisle 2000:40. Bhambra (2007) takes issue scholarly understanding of Europe as the 'owner' of modernity. Proceeding with Europe as the instinctive reference point and 'privileging Europe' in narratives of the making of modernity has implications for the social theories we develop in the present.
[308] For example: high heels originated in Persia in the Twelfth Century and illustrate the borrowing of sartorial practices; fashion systems and lavish displays of wealth in Victorian courts were connected to conquest; and the industrial revolution and related changes in fashion relied on the production of cotton by slaves. The making of modernity cannot be claimed by the West in isolation of the resources, ideas, labor, cultures and consumer markets in other parts of the world.

expressions of status and the introduction of new textiles; and cultural dress forms emerge from the relations of encounter, conquest, colonialization, and neoliberal capitalism. Redefining fashion as a 'modern' practice in which 'Africans' have long participated presents historical and contemporary African dress in a new light.

Lastly, clothing in the field of fashion is characterized by artistic expression of style and self-conscious change. Fashion involves niche as well as large-scale producers that use the value of art for art's sake as well art for commerce. In my view, contrary to suggestions that fashion 'trickles down' and 'haut couture' is 'pure' art (Barthes 1967; Bourdieu 1984), I believe 'high' and 'popular' fashion are more entangled that emulating. Rather than popular fashion imitating high fashion, or high fashion existing apart and *a priori*, I see high and popular fashion as commodified and rationalized differently, and separated through distancing processes. If high and popular culture are viewed as relational, it reveals how they alternatively inspire and imitate each other.

African print fashion has a long history.[309] Fashionable variations of *kaba* and *slit* include strap and sleeve embellishments such as shoulder pads or puffy sleeves; off-shoulder, one-shoulder, and strapless tops; high front, side and back slits; and fishtail and pleated skirts, to name a few. Since the 2000s, *African print* styles have expanded dramatically beyond *kaba* and *slit,* and *African print* fashion has enjoyed a revival in Africa and beyond. *African print* fashions now use the textile now for loafers and high heels, swimwear, purses, jewelry, iPod and iPhone covers, bow ties, and a host of other products.

[309] The present study does not attempt an historical review of African print fashion but, I believe, a case can be made for the existence of a long history of *African print* fashions, evinced in Ghana by changing styles of *kaba and slit*. The inclination to fix *kaba and slit* as 'traditional' dress comes from its relatively stable appearance, however, *kaba* and *slit* styles have undergone sundry transformations.

As artist and commentator Iké Udé comments, "African art or fashion is not new – quite the contrary. What is relatively new on the local stage are African artists and fashion designers deservedly operating with a creative autonomy that has not been seen before."[310] African designers and models are making strong impressions internationally and, the more Africans feature in fashion shows in New York, Paris, London and Milan, the more the fashion world appears to be having an 'African moment'.[311] As Helen Jennings succinctly puts it, "Africa is fashion's new frontier."[312]

Important to the recent proliferation of *African print* fashion are online platforms that emerged in the last decade and that have steadily increased the visibility and publicity of African fashion events, trends, designer labels, and people. [313] Commercial platforms and fashion blogs disseminate information and products at the same time as they (re)produce fashion hierarchies and boundaries. Serving continental and Diaspora markets, online platforms popularize African print fashion and expand opportunities for *print* fashion commerce. In Ghana, growing internet access is possible in large part thanks to smart phones. Internet access enables consumers to follow, contribute to, and take advantage of a wide variety of fashion education and advertising. Textiles companies and fashion designers are taking advantage of social media and online marketing to reach more consumers.

African metropolises are also becoming fashion centers in their own right. Accra hosted its first fashion week in 2012, and other cities across the continent now

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[310] Jennings 2013:7
[311] Ibid
[312] Ibid
[313] Among the most popular commercial platforms and fashion blogs are *bellaNaija.com, myAsho.com, lady-africa.com, stylesafrik.com, africanlookbook.com, bhfshoppingmall.com, theafropolitnshop.com*, , *shaddersafrica.com*, *africanpulse.eu, sappellé.com, Afrikinspired.storenvy.com, veneka.co.uk, shopsba.com, styledbyafrica.com, osisiafrica.com, cjaj09.myshopify.com,* and *mayasi.co.uk*.

sponsor major fashion events.[314] Fashion weeks render visible the boundaries and relational positions of designers, buyers, and media in the field of fashion. Indeed, the fashion system depends on regular and institutionalized changes in dress styles and practices of adornment and, as Sandra Neissen (2003) puts it, "Who has, and who does not have fashion is politically determined, a function of power relations."[315] Implicit in the idea of fashion are aesthetic and material judgments about who's 'in' and 'out', what's 'new' and 'dated'. At the heart of these binary assessments are 'moral' judgments that define and shape notions of what is 'beautiful' and 'ugly'.[316] Fashion also creates hierarchies that distinguish between 'high', 'niche', and 'mass', or 'popular', fashions.[317] Material and symbolic power in the fashion industry converge in the fashion label. Labels signal the price and aesthetic affiliation of the clothing and wearer. The fashion industry relies on labels to establish and reproduce aesthetic power.

As Entwisle and Rocamora (2006) argue, fashion shows render visible boundaries and relational positions at play in the field of fashion. Additionally, fashion shows provide opportunities for designers, textiles manufacturers, jewelers, models,

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[314] Senegal, South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya have long held fashion weeks (11 years, 15 years, years respectively). Other African countries are establishing fashion weeks, Ghana in 2012, and in 2013, Malawi, Zambia, and Sierra Leone, to name a few.

[315] Neissen 2003:245. See also Davis 1992. As a field which normalizes contests for distinction through creative and material expression, fashion is inherently political. Fashion's power centers range from cities (Milan, Paris, London and New York), to people (designers, celebrities, stylists etc.) identified as having impeccable style. Fashion hierarchies are (re)produced by people with power to make claims to fashion, and power is used to create boundaries between those endowed with greater creative ability or material capacity, and those who have less of both.

[316] See Baudrillard (2001:186) for a more detailed discussion of the politics of fashion binaries. Despite Baudrillard's important observations about fashion and consumption, I believe he goes too far. Baudrillard suggests consumption is perhaps more important than production. My own view is that they are interrelated, and neither needs to be elevated as more important than the other. Their existence is mutually dependent and reinforcing. Orthodox Marism privileges production to the exclusion of consumption and post-modern analysis at times minimizes production – neither is sufficient in constructing an holistic understanding of capitalist structures, processes and problems.

[317] In its most elite forms, high fashion relates as 'fine art' – either un-commodified (as in not for sale) or affordable only to a privileged few (Rovine, 2009).

make-up artists, and hair stylists to showcase their work and earn a living. They provide business for visual and graphic artists, photographers, service staff at event venues, fashion buyers and bloggers. And, as fashion products move from the runway to the rack, more employment in retail is made possible. Additionally, in the last fifty years, international luxury brands promoted exclusivity at the same time as they expanded mass retailing of 'derived products' such as bags, wallets, and scarves with visible labels or signature looks. [318] In this way, high fashion invited exclusive as well as aspirational consumption, and designer labels appealed to both elite and mass consumers.[319] As such, high and popular fashion can be seen as reinforcing, rather than constituting national antinomies or mutually exclusive domains. Moreover, neither high nor popular fashion exist a priori; rather, they relate to and reposition one another.

In Accra, boutiques are scattered across the city and serve as showrooms and retail spaces for designers. Outfits are primarily custom-tailored, but also produced as *prêt à porter* clothing. Fashion design is a growing career choice for residents of Accra, and a sense of optimism prevails about 'African' fashion and design. Put succinctly, the belief is growing that "African fashion is wearable and globally relevant."[320] A New York Times article published in 2005 by acclaimed fashion journalist Suzy Menkes recognized expansions in African fashion design, and forecasted 'Africa' as the 'next stop' in global fashion.[321] In 2012, the title of the IHT Luxury fashion conference was 'The Promise of Africa', and leaders in fashion such as Jean Paul Gaultier, Vivienne Westwood, and Monolo Blahnik celebrated 'Africa' as

[318] Grumbach 1993: 105
[319] Bourdieu suggests consumption choices by elite and mass consumers can be categorized as judgments in a "taste of necessity" or "taste of liberty" (Bourdieu 1984:6).
[320] Samuel Mensah, Ghanaian CEO of fashion label KISUA http://newafricanfashion.com/.
[321] See "Next Stop, Africa" Menkes 2005:60.

the 'next frontier'. The conference assessed and encouraged interest in 'Africa' as a producer and consumer of luxury fashion goods, and aimed to expand numbers of luxury fashion houses across Africa.[322]

Around the same time, interest in 'African' fashion materialized in the expensive and exclusive collections of designer labels showing in global fashion cities. A panoply of textiles feature in collections inspired by 'Africa' or created by African designers, but *African print* is particularly prevalent, presented as symbol or shorthand for fashion-forward 'Africa'. Within this echelon of apparel production, premium Vlisco products are desired as critical components of 'luxury' fashion.[323]

Additionally, in mass stores such as JC Penny, H&M and Aldo, *African print* features as a popular accent – clothing and accessories described variably as 'tribal', 'ethnic', and 'African' imitates *print* colors and patterns using non-descript brands. Attention to 'Africa' and *African print* fashion and retail in Europe and North America, directs 'non-African' consumers towards 'African' fashion, and confirms that for fashion consumers around the world that *African print* is in vogue. Vlisco's decision to rebrand as a fashion house occurred within this context of growing interest in 'African' fashion and *African print* more specifically.

Neoliberal Branding: Vlisco as a Fashion House

Rebranding required that Vlisco make minor changes to production, and major restructuring of the means and meanings of consumption. Specifically, Vlisco reconfigured retailing infrastructure and deployed new sales and marketing practices.

[322] Burberry has retailed in South Africa since 2008; Louis Vuitton, Fendi, Gucci, Prada and Miu Miu have shops in Morocco; and Salvatore Ferragamo and Ermenegildo Zegna opened shops in Nigeria in 2012. Luxury fashion brands are steadily building greater presence and consumer loyalty in Africa.
[323] Burberry, Jean Paul Gautier, L.A.M.B. and Stella Jean are among a long list of high fashion labels that have released African print collections since 2010.

The brand began launching new designs as fashion 'collections' with different themes and colors every three months. Rapid release of new designs allows Vlisco to stay ahead of illicit imitators and to present itself as the leading edge of 'what's new' in fashion.[324] With each collection, Vlisco produces television and radio advertising campaigns, billboards, 'lookbooks', and fashion shows.[325]

Against opulent, 'cultured' and 'exotic' backgrounds, lean black models depict images of feminine refinement, grace, and elegance. They embody Vlisco's core values of "imagination, elegance, class and quality."[326] Vlisco's advertising seeks to persuade consumers they can be more sophisticated, beautiful, and empowered with the brand's products, and high fashion imagery shapes the (un)conscious consumer's ideas about 'African' fashion and beauty. Generally, in advertising, notions of consumer inadequacy are sold in tandem with fantasies of who consumers can become – adverts point to the potential of realizing one's ideal self by purchasing advertised products. For Vlisco, like other brands, advertising is a long-term investment in the brand's image and reputation.[327]

Vlisco increases interest in its billboard and print advertising by, occasionally, casting 'average' people as models for fashion collections. For example, in 2012, Vlisco began a 'Mothers and Daughters' campaign that uses fashion photography with actual mother-daughter pairings as models; girls, adult, and elderly women are depicted wearing Vlisco *prints* and striking endearing yet glamorous poses. The campaign represents 'Love through the generations!' As one of the taglines explains,

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[324] The logic is that Chinese imitations typically take two or three months to arrive on the market, and by vamping up new design releases, Vlisco stays ahead of the competition.
[325] Erecting billboards, publishing lookbooks, and launching a host of commercials, fashion shows and promotional events, Vlisco's new fashion forward strategy is apparent on the streets of Accra, online, on television, and on the radio.
[326] Vlisco PowerPoint presentation at Accra store opening November 1, 2012 (fieldnotes)
[327] Sidney Levy explains, is central to its success, and investments in advertising significantly shapes the image and reputation of brands (Levy 2003:102).

"The adult daughter inherits her mother's wisdom, heritage, and love of Vlisco fabrics."[328] With love and beauty on display, Vlisco appeals to the heart, at the same time it appeals to 'average' consumers who dream of modeling for Vlisco and enjoying the related (momentary) fame.

In addition to changes in advertising, Vlisco's expansions in retail infrastructure enabled more focus on its representation as high fashion. The flagship shops Vlisco opened in 'world class' shopping malls in key markets, namely Benin, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana are all carefully crafted to evoke as sense of elite fashion.[329] Each shop is designed by a 'merchandising expert' from the Netherlands charged with creating enticing displays for 'classic' as well as new *African print* collections. [330] The first Vlisco shop in Accra opened in November 2012 in the Accra Mall, purposefully located at the country's first "world-class shopping center."[331] At the shop's launch, cultural intermediaries and celebrities looked on as brand representatives cut ribbons, dramatically pulled back curtains, and violin players welcomed an exclusive list of invited guests and press to browse the beautiful, brightly lit show room.

Located at the first entrance of the Accra Mall, the Vlisco shop sits across from the Woodin shop. The Vlisco Group is comprised of four brands – Vlisco, Woodin, GTP and Uniwax – and having two shops located across from each other is a tremendous sales advantage. As a Woodin retail manager commented, "The location is great – you look left, you look right it's all the same coffer, two shops, one coffer."

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[328] Another tag line announces, "Proud African mothers have passed on their love for the prestige, quality and craftsmanship of true original Super-Wax fabrics."
[329] Vlisco also opened a shop in France intended to reach the African Diaspora in Europe.
[330] Vlisco flagship stores are now located in Ghana, Benin, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, Vlisco also opened a shop in France intended to the African Diaspora in Europe.
[331] www.accramall.com. Accessed July, 2015.

The manager continued, "You have to be strategic about your shop. You have your sales shops and your image shops. The shop in Möevenpick [Hotel] is all about image. Sales there are actually quite small and we're losing money on the shop, but when people see our shop there it looks very good for us."

Since the grand opening, young (mostly) female shop attendants invite customers through the shop's glass doors, and politely inquire what customers desire. The mall is clean and predictable in ways open-air markets never are, transactions are formal and foot traffic orderly. There are no rushing porters, no offensive smells, no beating sun. Instead, the mall is air-conditioned and designed for 'middle class' consumers to revel in its vastness and, with the help of scintillating visual displays, dream of more consumption. A global 'middle class' shopping experience is marketed to those who can, and cannot, afford it. Because entry is free and 'just looking' encouraged, consumer dreams are 'democratized' in the mall. Moreover, women are dominant in this space; they work in sales, retail, and marketing, and shop for household and other goods. For many women malls are public spaces of relative safety, places where they can loiter and wander without harassment.

Staff in the Vlisco shop at the Accra Mall are well-groomed, mostly female attendants who engage in forms of *African print* retail and display that more closely resemble corporate retail than the retail practices of market women in open-air markets. As customers walk in, sales staff offer greetings, smiles, and questions about how they can help. Attendants present themselves as experts on Vlisco's products and rich tradition. Everything in the Vlisco store carefully dressed and positioned in a staged performance of luxury retail –attendants, mannequins, and displays all playing their part.

In terms of marketing, Vlisco created the 'Vlisco Ambassador' program, which invites audiences across West and Central Africa to honor successful and inspiring women in their respective national contexts. To select 'Vlisco Ambassadors', the public votes from a shortlist of nominated celebrities as well as less-known but highly accomplished market traders, business women, doctors, actresses, and engineers. Vlisco crowns and celebrates winners in pageantry fashion, and ambassadors have the 'honor' of representing the Vlisco brand. Vlisco Ambassadors are hard-working, hard-nosed heroines who have inspiring stories, and sizeable fan followings. As Vlisco publicly recognizes the accomplishments of successful individuals, the brand is associated with women's empowerment. The 'Vlisco Ambassador' competitions provide high profile opportunities for known and unknown women to 'win' social status, and construct celebrity personalities.

Additionally, Vlisco launched a 'Talent Fund' as a platform for emerging fashion designers to compete for cash prizes, contracts and coveted networking opportunities in the fashion industry. The competition encourages creative production and provides financial support for 'African' fashion design. Marketing through talent competitions entangles Vlisco's interests with the growing infrastructure of Ghana's culture industries, and normalizes corporate sponsorship of creative expression. Additionally, in 2014, Vlisco launched a 'Tailor Academy' in Ghana, which works in partnership with two design institutions to provide tailoring education to "talented, underprivileged and motivated girls to reach their financial autonomy."[332] Through the 'Talent Fund' and 'Tailor Academy', Vlisco very intentionally knits itself into the livelihoods of retailers, designers, tailors, models, advertisers, and fashion media in West Africa. As the Vlisco website explains:

[332] Vlisco is partnering with ProLink Organization and Joyce Ababio College of Creative Design. See http://about.vlisco.com/news/start-vlisco-tailor-academy-ghana/ Accessed, 4.11.2017

> "For Vlisco Group, the investment in the African fashion world and the empowerment of women, are the drivers for a long-lasting initiative: creating a platform that connects African's fashion talent and creativity with the knowledge and activities of Vlisco Group in the African and global fashion world.

While less dramatic than transformations in consumption, Vlisco also made modifications to production. The factory in Helmond became less responsive to custom orders from African vendors, and paid less attention to regional and cultural preferences for different colors. Limited colorways enabled the Vlisco factory to turnaround new designs faster, and to accentuate 'fashion' over previously acknowledged ethnic and regional color preferences.[333]

Additionally, Vlisco expanded its product lines. Moving from exclusively cotton print textiles, Vlisco added a limited line of 'luxury' accessories, including leather bags with *print* accents, and silk scarves. Embossed with the Vlisco name and insignia, these derived products provide consumers opportunities to display real or aspired inclusion in luxury 'African' fashion circles. Vlisco released Luxury Edition and Limited Edition textiles made with combinations of lace and cotton delicately embroidered with gold and silver threads, or sequins and crystals.[334]

In 2012, in a fashion collection titled, 'Silent Empire', Vlisco released a Luxury Edition bejeweled with sequins and Swarovski crystals. Priced at fifteen times more than the popular 'Chinese' brand Hitarget, Vlisco's Luxury Editions appeal to a small group of wealthy African consumers who value Vlisco as art and desire the

[333] Vlisco's conscious decision to discount color preferences is an example of how the brand exerts its power in African print markets. Because Vlisco is endowed with cultural capital, it can influence aesthetic choices and cultural practices. The extent of Vlisco's influence is still in question, given the proliferation and acceptance of 'China'-made prints.

[334] For example, the inaugural 'luxury' collection, entitled *Trésor Brilliant*, included lace textiles embossed with Swarovski crystals. The lookbooks for this collection featured models in streets of gold and sparkling dresses, glimmering under bright lights.

attendant status of 'high culture'. Limited and Luxury Editions operate in a field of restricted production, that creates 'art for art's sake' rather than satisfying large-scale production or popular functional fashion.[335] To the few consumers who are quick and solvent enough to purchase Vlisco's Limited Edition *prints*, these 'keepsakes' and impressive textiles confer feelings of exclusivity, distinction, and impeccable taste.[336] The personal and social projects of both creative producers and consumers intertwine repeatedly with the commercial interests of Vlisco's 'Silent Empire'.

The notion of Vlisco as a 'Silent Empire' invites further consideration. As the last standing brand related to a long history of textiles exchange dating back to the 1800s, Vlisco is connected to the Dutch Empire's gory past. Consequently, marketing that celebrates Vlisco's long achievements produce interesting contradictions. For one, Vlisco's glorification of Dutch 'originality' in producing *African print* relies on a very particular reading of history, one that minimizes the originality of creative producers in Java and West and Central Africa.

An example from Vlisco's website makes the point. On a tab labeled 'Inspiration', a large title reads: "Vlisco. The True Original. Unique Designs and Expressions, Since 1846." Below the heading the text continues:

> "Because we are celebrating 170 years of Vlisco and you, we would like to take you on the journey of how Vlisco has become the most favourable Dutch wax (Wax Hollandais) in West- and Central Africa. The journey started more than 400 years ago when the Dutch *discovered* the wonderful technique of fabric decoration and batik design in Java, Indonesia ... The Dutch used these designs as inspiration and started *recreating* the batik fabrics…[that] were adapted to the West African taste and tradition and became popular. During the 16th century, the

[335] See Bourdieu 1993:53 for a discussion of *restricted* versus *large-scale* fashion.
[336] "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects…distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed" (Bourdieu 1984:6). There is an opposition formed in the distance between what Bourdieu calls the "taste of necessity" and the "taste of liberty-or luxury", where the former is concerned with the most economical products, the latter privileges presentation and stylized forms (Bourdieu 1984:6).

> Dutch were *fascinated* by the resource-rich Gold Coast region, which became the independent nation of Ghana… Batik motifs were often very small and precise. In contrast, our Vlisco designs were bigger and brighter in extraordinary colour settings, especially *curated for* our beloved African consumer. The designs and motifs became African, with a universal touch" (*emphasis added).*[337]

The above narrative explains Vlisco's origins and success in relation to Dutch 'discovery' and 'recreation' of batik in Java, and Dutch 'fascination' with now 'independent' Ghana and careful 'curation' of goods for the benefit of consumers.

While true in some respects, Vlisco's representation of history depends on the silencing and elision of important realities. For one, the origins of *batik,* or wax-resist techniques, trace further back to Egypt in the Fourth Century BC and the Tang Dynasty (618-907AD) in China. Javanese *batik* is important to the *wax print* story because of Dutch colonialism in Java and economic and cultural plunder. Vlisco's representation of Dutch 'discovery' and 'recreation' of *batik* assumes Europe is the center of world history and that 'discovery' is linked to Europe's encounter with people and things that it previously did not know. Additionally, the notion of 'discovery' erases the horrific violence and subordination that accompanied Dutch and Javanese relations.

In terms of the Dutch in West and Central Africa, 400 years ago, textiles were among the most popular goods exchanged for slaves, gold, ivory, and pepper. To suggest that the Dutch encounter with the Gold Coast was a 'fascination' is a dangerous euphemism for trade that included the brutal trafficking of human beings. Also, Vlisco's origin narrative mentions Ghana gaining 'independence' without naming 'colonialism'. Colonialism is more than as a passing point in Ghana's history. Colonial offices made decisions not to invest in manufacturing facilities in West

[337] http://v-inspired.vlisco.com/vlisco-the-true-original/ Accessed March 20, 2017

Africa, and they structured trade policies to favor European interests. For decades, British colonial authorities and Anglo-Dutch interests in the form of Unilever significantly determined the supply and distribution of *wax print* textiles in the region. Imperial domination and colonialism are central to how the Dutch brand, Vlisco, 'became popular' in West and Central Africa.

In addition, importantly, in 1846, the year Vlisco celebrates as the birth of the brand, parts of Indonesia (known then as the Dutch East Indies) *and* parts of Ghana (known then as the Dutch Gold Coast) were colonial trading posts in the Dutch Empire. Through the Dutch Empire's worldwide reach, Vlisco gained access to cultural techniques, practices, and markets across imperial space. Celebrating 170 years of Vlisco without recognizing the role of imperial violence, cultural appropriation, and colonialism in Java and the Gold Coast, reproduces the understanding of Europe as the center of world discovery and innovation, at the same time as it promotes the notion of Vlisco as the originator of premium *prints*.[338]

Remaking the Social with Distance

Vlisco's various forms of high fashion branding serve as *distancing* mechanisms in material and symbolic ways, they move Vlisco and its customers farther away from 'cheap' brands and customers. Distancing in the realm of consumption is a process of stratification and a function of power. The process creates real, and imagined, space between those with capital – economic, social, technical, and cultural – and those without.[339] *Distancing* constructs notions of 'us' and 'them', and builds boundaries to

[338] Of course, brands do not wish to celebrate connections to colonial and imperial domination; the very idea tarnishes a brand. However, if Vlisco gave up more of its claim to discovery and origination, it might be able to construct a less problematic history of excellent craftsmanship and market longevity.
[339] Capital here is conceived as social, cultural, as well as economic.

maintain separations. Distancing is at work in the construction of gated communities, tiered travel experiences, and representations of 'luxury' versus 'generic' things, to name a few examples.[340]

In Ghana, high fashion branding separates 'middle class' and 'informal' consumers; it sets apart the shopping space of markets from malls, and constructs distinctly different practices, performances and styles of retail. By physically moving away from open-air markets as the brand's primary retail space, Vlisco creates spatial and symbolic distance between luxury retail and the frenzy and informality of the market. Spectacular displays, ingratiating sales staff, and shiny surfaces create a different 'feel' to shopping in the mall versus shopping in markets. Physically and culturally distinct from shopping in open-air markets, the mall conspicuously constructs 'middle class' material conditions and social relations of consumption. At the same time, 'middle class' shopping spaces and practices reshape consumer desire and subjectivity.

Importantly for Vlisco, *African print* manufactured in China is not sold in the Accra Mall.[341] Vlisco's shop not only distances the brand from competitors, it also signals the mall as a site worthy of a luxury band. As a publication promoting Vlisco suggested, "The image of the market is one of cheap and shoddy goods; it certainly doesn't have the prestigious aura of a luxury brand."[342] The text goes on to acknowledge that a majority of Vlisco's retail still occurs in open-air markets, and that Vlisco shops serve more as display rooms than retail outlets. As the author puts it:

> At a flagship store, sales volume probably isn't even the main priority. At least as important is the opportunity to communicate brand values, to display the entire collection and to inspire the customer and show her

[340] In production, distancing separates the offices of managers from the factory floor, it values and gives more meaning to the work of some over others.
[341] With a shop at the nearby Marina Mall, DaViva is the next closest competitor in physical proximity to the Vlisco and Woodin shops at the Accra Mall.
[342] Arts 2012:16

> all the brand's possibilities. Ultimately, this will benefit the 'perception' of the brand and, later on, the total volume of sales *(*Arts 2012:79, *emphasis in original)*

In the Vlisco shop at the Accra Mall, the demeanors and practices of shop attendants are dramatically different from market women. In contrast to the market, retail in the mall takes on a transactional and predictably performative character. Presentation is paramount, and shop attendants are part of the overall sales performance and "general seduction machine."[343]

New retail infrastructure in physical and virtual space, coupled with corporate retailing and marketing practices, connects Vlisco more closely to consumers in the middle and upper classes, as well as niche 'high fashion' markets. Adverts portray young and thin black women captured in high fashion poses highlighting the beauty and creativity of the Vlisco textile/dress on display. Models encourage Vlisco consumers to 'think outside' *kaba* and *slit*, and to consider the avant-garde, risqué and the unusual. The promotion of Vlisco for experimental 'fashionable' clothing signals a shift in the historical meanings and valuations of *Dutch wax*, at the same time as it illuminates changes in the new economy.

In interviews, consumers expressed contrasting perspectives on the value of Vlisco. For some, *Vlisco* is still viewed as an investment; a product with material and symbolic currency, especially when preserved uncut. The notion of Vlisco as inheritance persists, but the future of this practice is uncertain. For others, Vlisco is premium material for fashion pieces that 'stand out' or make a 'statement' at social and industry events. In such 'fashion conscious' contexts, outfits are scrutinized and

[343] Corrigan 1997: 58

committed to memory – *who* wore *what* is subject to public and private critique. To cultivate and maintain influence in fashion circles requires limiting how many times one wears the same outfit. The 'middle class' logic of not 'repeating' outfits is materialized by consumers who acquire more clothing made with Vlisco *print*, or refashion existing clothing in interesting new ways. Vlisco serves as 'raw material' for dress products, and Ghanaian tailors and designers add value by creating 'art-like' and 'fashionable' clothing. Social competitions in this field of fashion play out in the meanings associated with *African print* brands, as well as the aesthetics of dress design. Unique and fashionable outfits made from Vlisco are placed at the top of the fashion hierarchy, and separated from mundane, mass-produced clothing.

The willingness of fashion-conscious consumers, or 'fashionistas', to regularly purchase and discard clothing explains, in part, Vlisco's interest in them as a target consumer group. The idealized 'fashionista' is embodied by skinny young black models in Vlisco advertising and fashion shows. 'Fashionistas' are associated with younger women consumers, however, outside of shows, fashion sensibilities and priorities are shared by a wide variety of other consumer groups. Across Accra, mature men and women wear fashionable *African print* clothing in 'Western' and 'traditional' styles. Fashionable *kaba* and *slit* options abound for both young and older consumers, and unique 'fashionista' pieces are not restricted to the wardrobes of young people. Moreover, children's clothing lines are on the rise, producing little *print* outfits and fashions. No one age group has exclusive rights to *African print* fashion. However, the repeated representation of young female models in fashion advertising and marketing construct a more limited perception of what, and who, is fashionable. The young models who embody 'high fashion' are represented as higher up in the beauty hierarchy in 'refinement', 'elegance', and 'class' than ordinary fashions on the street.

At the end of 2014, as Vlisco opened a shop in the West Hills Mall, the brand's self-representation as a fashion house appeared fully established, with complimenting elements in retail, marketing, and production. As the Vlisco website explained, the shop in West Hills is intended to create a scintillating experience for consumers: "Enveloping them in the brand world, with new products, old favourites, new services and promotions, Vlisco aims to provide the fashion savvy consumers of Accra with even more fashion inspiration and service than ever before. New products and services will be available, such as the new Ready to Wear clothing range 'Vlisco Prêt à Porter'; bags and scarves; 'Prêt à Créer', shorter length pieces of fabric in a handy set, professional styling advice and tailoring service ('Prêt à Couture')."[344] Settling into provision of derived products, mass-produced as well as custom-fit clothing, and a range of marketing strategies, Vlisco is adapting a wide range of marketing and retail strategies that remake consumption and social competitions in the field of fashion.

Conclusion

Vlisco's rebranding as a fashion house involved deployment of a range of new marketing and retailing practices intended, I argue, to *distance* the brand in material and symbolic ways from 'cheap' alternatives. Vlisco's mode of distancing through high fashion marketing and luxury shopping capitalizes on Africa's growing fashion industries, and appeals to the shopping preferences of the newly emergent consumers in the (upper) middle classes. Vlisco's remaking of the brand is a simultaneously remaking of the signs of status, linking the upper middle classes to high fashion and high-end shopping practices. The distancing this accomplishes is figurative as well as material as

[344] http://about.vlisco.com/news/new-vlisco-store-opens-at-west-hills-mall-in-accra-ghana/

Vlisco repositions meanings of its brand through advertising and visual imagery, and literally distances itself from cheap retail and products.

Additionally, investments in high fashion marketing shift Vlisco's target consumer group from mature 'mommies' to fashionistas'; they refocus retail from open-air markets to shopping malls; shift sales from market women to corporate shop attendants; and broadcast Vlisco's values and self-representation as a dominant voice in African fashion. Importantly, as Vlisco represents the 'originality' and 'authenticity' of the brand, it erases the ugly histories of Dutch imperial and colonial domination.

While consumers invest in Vlisco for its aesthetic, social, and cultural value, *African print* is used, more generally, to signal multiple other personal, group, and cultural meanings. The meanings of *print* given by Vlisco exist in a larger world of symbolic meanings, in addition to specific brand valuation. Put simply, consumers care about more than the creativity and status of the Vlisco brand; they also care about personal style and fashion, cultural fluency, and social identity. Even though powerful state and multinational interests shape *African print* markets and meanings, consumers actively choose what textiles to purchase, what to wear, and how to interpret the meanings of clothing. The next chapter turns to this wider world of consumer meanings and subjectivity.

CHAPTER 6

REFASHIONING 'AFRICA': SOCIAL DIFFERNTIATION AND TRANSFORMING MEANINGS OF DRESS

The lens of *African print* makes visible national and corporate projects in Ghana, and illuminates the entanglements of global commodity chains and cultural markets. However, the skeins and schemes of the new market are not wholly determined by the interests of the state or multinational capital – there is wide-reaching remaking of the significance of *African print* by dress producers and consumers. In particular, the increasing importance of fashion in Ghana creates contestations over the meanings of *African print* at the same as it constructs highly visible forms of social differentiation. The tendency in fashion towards rapid obsolescence in style, the construction of 'high' and 'popular' fashion forms, and fashion's obsession with beautiful young women produces contrasting judgments about *African print* consumption. For example, consumers express opposing perspectives about 'high quality' versus 'cheap' fashion; groups preserving old dress traditions clash with those promoting fashion-forward dress styles; and struggles for social influence emerge as the bodies of young models take the focus from mature women of stature. In these ways, *African print* fashion illustrates how gendered differences relating to class position, cultural heritage, generational affiliation, and body size are reproduced in the new market.

In addition, for producers, workers, and cultural intermediaries in the fashion industry, the neoliberal moment represents a flourishing of opportunity, a chance to be creative and earn income. However, at the moment that possibilities for aesthetic expression increase, new exclusionary practices and hierarchies emerge in the ranking of apparel producers and the circumscription of people 'in' and 'out' of fashion. While *print* fashions take on myriad meanings, they are increasingly represented as an

alternative to 'Western' dress, and used to make claims to a generically 'African' identity. The bold colors, patterns, and styles of *African print* dress are 'read' on black bodies as symbols of 'African' culture, beauty, creativity and fashion. Wearing *African print* enunciates 'Africa' in the language of dress, materializes identification with 'Africa', and constructs temporary links to an imagined 'African' community.

This chapter examines the significance of the rise of fashion in remaking meanings of *African print* dress and reconstructing social difference and identity. The meanings of dress are never monolithic, and are always subject to reinterpretation and revision. With this in mind, the chapter does not attempt an exhaustive account of meanings or social differentiation. Rather, with attention to gender, class, generational differences, cultural heritage, and the racialized body, I provide a series of snapshots to build a dynamic view of the role of fashion in shaping *African print* dress production and consumption. In my view, the culture of customized dress production in Ghana, and the expansion of (inter)national markets for 'African' fashion are critical to the remaking of meaning and social identity in the new market.

Symbolic Meaning and the Dressed Body

Consumer meanings work with and against 'corporate cultures', 'national cultures', 'traditional cultures', and 'consumer cultures'.[345] Placing producers and consumers in 'cultural' groups makes more apparent the contested nature of collective symbolic meaning. Furthermore, it indicates that the cultural sphere is where struggles over meaning become manifest materially and symbolically, and are

[345] 'Corporate culture' in this context could be the marketing narratives and practices of multinational capital in *African print* markets. 'National dress culture' refers here to the selective traditions used in state textiles/dress development projects. 'Traditional culture' here includes practices of wearing particular colors and styles to cultural and social events such as funerals, weddings, out-dooring ceremonies etc. 'Consumer culture' can be thought of expanded consumption in the new market, and the global culture of growing materialism.

continuously 'worked through' (Volosinov 1973). The capacity to assign (and access) meaning is unevenly distributed, and articulating these inequalities provides a lens into the configuration of social groups, structures, and relations. According to Lee (1993), cultural forms are the "critical sites of struggle upon which various social groups attempt to define the boundaries of social meaning" and, in doing so, transform consumer goods into objects of control as well as sites of symbolic contestation.[346]

In terms of dress, studies emphasize the consciousness of the consumer and centrality of the body in deciding what to wear. Dressing the body is a conscious, corporeal experience that influences how we 'feel' about our bodies, our clothing, and ourselves. Our 'feelings' about clothing options and fit shape dress decisions – they explain how staring at a wardrobe or chests of clothes, one can exclaim, "I have nothing to wear". Dress phenomenology is coupled with semiotic elements that make dress 'readable' as text (Barthes 1967). As such, self-narratives and social commentary are critical to the world of dress. The dressing subject makes choices that embody a particular 'look' or 'image' expressing individual and collective aesthetics, social positions, associations, and values.

According to Bourdieu (1984 [2010]), within networks of symbolic exchange, status comes from both the ability to accumulate goods (economic capital) as well as expertise in knowing how to discriminate between goods (cultural and aesthetic capital). Symbolic power is concentrated amongst actors and institutions that 'consecrate' particular meanings, values, rules, norms, and 'tastes'; people Bourdieu refers to as 'cultural intermediaries'. In 'Le Couturier' Bourdieu and Delsaut argue that the field of fashion is "ruled by the competition for the monopoly of specific

[346] Lee 1993:48

legitimacy, that is for the exclusive power to constitute and impose the legitimate symbols of distinction in regards to clothing" (Bourdieu and Delsaut, 1975:15).

'Haute couture', or 'high fashion', is associated with art, elite circles and limited production and, as such, receives higher status and legitimacy than popular fashion associated with mass production and consumer culture (Bourdieu 1993:132). Cultural intermediaries establish borders between high and popular fashion, in addition to discriminating between what is 'fashionable' and what is not. The language, or discourse, of fashion insiders is a critical dimension of reproducing hierarchies within the field of fashion. As Rocamora (2009) puts it, "Words that are used in fashion writing do not simply describe the value of objects they are related to, they make it."[347] Building on Bourdieu and Delsaut (1975), Rocamora argues that fashion discourse, including the discourse of designers, journalists, and fashion media describes and (re)positions a range of competing products, brands, and people.[348] She explores the notion that 'written clothing' – the captions, reports, and literature in online and print magazines – contribute to structuring hierarchies in the field of fashion. Moreover, photographers, models, and magazines 'act out' a 'lived reality' at fashion shows, where both fashion and fashion hierarchies are materialized, captured and reproduced (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006).

Fashion is embodied by models on 'catwalks', fashionistas, and experts at events, as well as by a range of people outside the fashion industry who 'perform' or 'act out' fashion in social, professional, and street settings. The individual, daily negotiations of dress and fashion require disciplining the body to fit social and fashion norms and values, and understanding of what is 'appropriate', 'acceptable', 'in' and 'out' of fashion. Generally, dress has immediate ideographic qualities, and dress codes

[347] Rocamora 2006:239
[348] Ibid

make the body more intelligible; they signal details regarding person, place, social values and position. Clothing shields and speaks volumes about the body.

Building on Michel Foucault's later work in *The Use of Pleasure* (1984) and *The Care of the Self* (1984), as well as Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Stuart Hall (1996) makes the case for the usefulness of 'identity' in understanding how discursive and disciplinary regulation of the body come together with psychic elements. As Hall suggests, discourse and regulation are complemented by self-constituting associations operating in the psyche and in the complex exchanges between the subject and the body (Hall 1996:13-14). Subjectivity is a cycling process of individuation and socialization, as individual and social interaction give each other meaning through constructions of identification and identity.

According to Hall: "In common sense language, identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (Hall 1996:2). For Hall, identification is "always in process", always becoming. Similarly, identities are not essentialized, singular, or unified, but rather strategic, positional, multiple, and changing. Providing a succinct but expansive definition, Hall explains: "I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture,* between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (Hall 1996:6, *emphasis in original*). Dress practices facilitate the construction and maintenance of social and cultural identities. Moreover, dress

discourse and normative practices regulate what we wear in public and private; they discipline the body and constitute a regulatory ideal that governs the body with a productive power; they shape how we feel about our bodies, our selves, and the social and personal categories that 'hail us into place'.

Social and subjective expression intersect in the construction of personal style. In the words of Georg Simmel, style "brings the contents of personal life and activity into a form shared by many and accessible to many."[349] Although informed by cultural norms, fashion trends and experts, cultural intermediaries, classic and seasonal 'looks', and shopping displays, style is always subjective, constructed, and enacted; always a reflection of individual affect, sensibilities, and personal 'truths'. Style illustrates the interplay between structure and agency as subjects adapt to, resist, and remake dress conventions.

Dress Cultures and African Print in the New Market

In order to appreciate the changes sparked by fashion in the new market, it is important to understand dress norms and cultural practices in Ghana more generally, and the role of *African print* in the field of dress. In Ghana, *African print* features in ceremonies, festivals, and social events, and is used variably to signal status, mark milestones, and express personal style. So-called 'traditional' styles such as o*fra ntoma, lappa,* and *kaba* and *slit* are popular, as are a range of tailored styles that imitate 'Western' clothing. Styles reflect the mixing and matching of indigenous and imported textiles to create dress forms read locally as casual, formal, professional, and street wear.

[349] Quoted in Wolff 1950 :341

Every Friday the streets of Accra come alive with color as people parade in 'Friday Wear' ranging from demure to risqué outfits. *African print* uniforms are worn by grade school students, state employees, and staff at banks, churches, schools and businesses, each made with *print* material designed with the colors and logos of their respective institutions. Friday is also a big day for funerals – as is Saturday – and mourners cluster in houses and stream down streets in 'traditional' *African print* attire. On Sundays, *African print* features heavily at church and social functions. Although Friday through Sunday are especially effervescent times for *print* performances in Accra, *African print* is also everyday wear.[350] Fitted *print* outfits show off the body form and put the latest fashions on display; they enable a particular 'way of life' related to quotidian material culture that is learned, performed, and passed down from generation to generation.

Colors of clothing are especially important to sartorial communication in Accra, and wearing the right colors at the right times conveys respect, belonging, and cultural fluency. At weddings, bright colors are expected. Also, the groom's family gifts *African print* to the bride, and the *cloth* she inherits from her family is packed into her 'wedding chest'.[351] *Cloth* is so central in Ga communities that weddings are sometimes referred to as 'six *cloth'* because of the six pieces of *cloth* the groom's family offers as gifts to the bride. In times past, the expectation was for six pieces of *Dutch wax print,* and families frequently took loans or bought *cloth* on credit to meet

[350] Everyday television presenters broadcast in stylish *African print* wardrobes. GTV (Ghana Television) has GTP as a corporate sponsor and newscasters are dressed in GTP *cloth*, and TV Africa apparently has different textile sponsors for different programs. As I was informed in an interview with a television producer, this practice is to portray "African culture" – a curiously undefined statement.
[351] Brides are customarily sent off by their families with a trousseau, a chest of practical and (if the family can afford it) luxury items to start her married life. Trousseaus hold heirlooms, household items and, typically, *African print cloth.*

this demand. However, today, inexpensive *print* brands, such as Hitarget, are accepted, and the pressures to buy *Dutch wax* have eased.

Additionally, in decades past, it was common practice for the elderly to acquire *African print* in anticipation of death. As a respondent described, the reason for this fading practice was that:

> "When your family members come they will judge your wealth and judge your prosperity by the number of *prints* that you have. That is very symbolic. So the old men and the old women, if they can afford it, they just try and collect some of these, so that they can save face when they are gone. They buy the *Dutch* because the *Dutch* is the most valued, more than our local ones. It could be the same design, but a *Dutch* one may cost twice as much as ours…And when people come they will judge whether it is *wax* from Holland or wax from here. They assess themselves, their prosperity, their value, by the sort of good quality *prints* that they have. And that makes the classic designs very important."

As with weddings, pressures to buy *Dutch wax* are easing as more 'cheap' textiles circulate in the new market. However, the importance of colors has not declined.

White colored *African print*, or blue and white, is worn on celebratory occasions such as naming ceremonies or the death of a person who lived a long and fulfilling life. In Akan culture, when a person dies before their time the immediate family and close relatives wear red and black *African print* mourning cloth, while other mourners wear black or brown and black.[352] Death is arguably the most important life event in Ghanaian society and elaborate arrangements are made for communities to pay their last respects. As such, funeral *cloth* is big business, and companies like Printex specialize in an array of white, black and brown, and black and red *print* patterns. Proverbial messages printed on funeral *cloth* are used at times to comment on the life of the departed. For example, in 2012 when President Atta Mills

[352] Red is believed to signal the passion between close family members and the deceased, and it is also believed to carry protective powers. In the case of a tragic death or the passing of an important family member, an older aged black cloth, called *kuntunkuni,* is worn to express the family's pain and profound grief (Salm and Falola 2002: 118).

died, the funeral cloth chosen was *sɛ asa*, translating loosely to 'It is finished' or 'You got what you wanted'. The cloth was chosen to signify a belief that pressures and ill-will from the President's adversaries contributed to his death.

The importance of colors and the symbolism of clothing in Accra was brought home to me in the first months of fieldwork when I learned how easy it is to offend by wearing the 'wrong' cloth, or the right cloth in the wrong way. In the first instance, I wore what I thought was an elegant black dress to the birthday party of an elderly woman. Midway through the gathering one of her grandchildren asked me if the reason I was dressed in black is because I didn't have time to go home and change. Her tone suggested that I should leave the party, but I stayed. The next moment that revealed my misunderstanding of the implications of colors was at a wedding. I had chosen to wear a turquoise, brown and black striped dress and, much like the time before, I was approached by the aunty of the groom and chastised. She asked, "Are you not happy for them? Are you trying to bring bad luck?" In a third instance, I wore a black and red knee-length *African print* skirt. Attracted to the motif and bright colors, I designed the skirt myself and paid a tailor in North Legon to sew it. Unbeknownst to me, I was wearing funeral cloth and attending meetings and social events none the wiser.

From Friday Wear to church on Sunday mornings, funerals, weddings, social events, nightclubs and house parties, looking good and being dressed appropriately matters in Ghana. Especially among the middle classes and most privileged segments of society, heavy emphasis is placed on grooming and 'good' presentation of the self in everyday life. Looking 'smart', 'fresh', 'attractive' and 'glamorous' are widespread aspirations and, accordingly, social disapproval is forthcoming if one appears 'unkempt' or 'scruffy'. Men and women invest significant amounts of time and money

regulating facial hair and the hair on their heads, while leg and chest hairs are given more flexible permissions.[353]

For most of the Twentieth Century, *African print* was a premium good that low-income consumers saved to procure and well-off individuals purchased as a status symbol. Trade liberalization opened retail options across classes, offering consumers more choice in terms of *African print* patterns, colors, and price points than ever before. For poor consumers and segments of the lower middle classes, the ubiquity of inexpensive *prints* created more possibilities to participate in dress practices. In this sense, the new market 'democratized consumption'. As some respondents explained, liberalization made consumption accessible to all, rather than just the wealthy, the middle classes, and those in the so-called 'West'. The affordability of some *African print* brands, often linked to imports from China, is perceived by some as one of the ways 'free markets' diminish inequality and enable wider participation in consumer markets.

A fashion designer I interviewed put it like this: "People can buy motorcycles in villages because of China. You think the U.S. is giving people bikes? Who can afford anything made in the U.S.? It's the same with *cloth.* I couldn't make these clothes with Vlisco. Am I made of money? Thank God for China." In reality, 'cheap' *prints* are also imported from India, Pakistan, and other countries in Asia. However, China is most associated with low quality inexpensive *prints*. For consumers with limited income and tailors and designers looking at their bottom lines, 'cheap' *prints* opens up both dress and business opportunities.

[353] Generally speaking, leg hair on women in Ghana is not regulated as aggressively as in Euro-America. It is quite common to see women in short skirts and dresses, with curly leg hairs below. Also, women with chin and chest hair

However, 'cheap' *prints* are not, by definition, durable, and they require frequent replacement due to fast-fading colors and thinning fabric. Moreover, as 'free markets' give more consumers access to *African print,* they simultaneously inspire new hierarchies and forms of status display as consumers who can afford to distinguish themselves by purchasing hand-woven textiles (such as *kente* and *batakari)* or expensive *African print* brands (such as Vlisco). *Kente* is still king in Ghana, it is the most lavish and expensive textile form, and it signals wealth and royalty in unsurpassable ways. Expensive varieties of *African print* also signal economic capital, and are easily detectable to the discerning eye. Consequently, despite what some view as the 'democratization' of consumption, *African print* clothing in Ghana remains inscribed in complex, conspicuous hierarchies.

Moreover, consumers in the upper middle classes and privileged groups at times express resentment and concerns about inexpensive *prints.* Consumers in the upper middle classes attempt to control representation in the cultural field by asserting the superior value of 'high-quality' goods and legitimizing their consumption of expensive *prints.* Conflicts about 'quality' are highly significant for social reproduction; in effect, they are struggles between people in the lower middle classes attempting to improve their social position by enhancing their possession of cultural capital, and efforts by people in the upper middle classes to draw new lines of distinction. Consumers in the upper middle classes often frame 'cheap' textiles are sometimes framed as representatives of a larger problem in consumer markets – the proliferation of inferior goods (from China). In interviews, questions were raised about the quality of *print* products manufactured in China, specifically about the potential of health hazards, such as carcinogenic dyes, in 'substandard' textiles. At the time of fieldwork, representatives at the Standards Board expressed similar concerns about the

possible dangers of low-quality imports, and admitted that they lacked the required machinery and capacity to adequately monitor and test the high volume of imports.[354] Starting in 2013, the Ghana Standards Board required that all textiles selvages display their country of origin in order to more easily trace the source of 'substandard' *prints*.

For some, the ubiquity of 'cheap' *prints* in the new market has also led to unwanted revisions to the social meanings of *African print* textiles, especially in the diminished importance of 'classic' designs. In focus groups, Howard et al (2012) find that Ghanaian consumer preferences have shifted from the 'classic' designs popular in the 1960s, to more abstract, geometric *prints* popular today, which generally lack symbolic meaning. *Prints* today are often brightly colored or embellished with gold and silver metallic accents, in stark contrast to demure, older designs. To be clear, 'classics' such as *Angelina*, *nsuo bura, ahene pa nkasa, and sika wo ntaban* remain the most popular iconic *prints* in circulation, but the practice of naming *prints* is in decline, and as is general knowledge of the names of 'classic' prints. For youthful consumers, aesthetic qualities such as color and motif outweigh the importance of symbolic meaning.[355] While local brands are taking advantage of these shifts by expanding product lines and ad campaigns targeting youthful consumers ('GTP NuStyle', and 'Woodin Nation' are examples), older consumers and individuals that wish to uphold cultural practices at times express disappointment and disapproval of the shift away from naming *prints* and valuing 'classics'.

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[354] In the hierarchy of global export standards, Africa is at the bottom. African markets are set up to receive low quality or inferior goods, products that might be considered unhealthy, unsafe, and environmental unsound in other regions of the world. At the time of fieldwork, the Ghana Standards Board did not possess equipment necessary to test the quality of imported *African print* and to verify the absence of toxins and carcinogenic dyes. Much of the equipment in GSB labs was provided by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and national funds to expand testing of products did not appear forthcoming.

[355] Howard et al 2012: 618

In my own interviews, respondents in their teens, twenties, and thirties 'confessed' to not knowing the names of classic *prints,* but suggested their mothers and grandmothers could name them.[356] A woman in her twenties I call Akosua suggested: "Elderly people are the ones who really like names of *cloth*. It's their thing." Akosua was wearing a green, yellow, and pink *African print* dress with a plunging sweetheart neckline. At the time, she worked in a shop in the Accra Mall and moonlighted as a tailor. She knew a lot about cloth. The design she was wearing did not have a name but she identified the brand as GTP NuStyle, a so-called 'local' brand. Akosua recounted a story about a close friend whose tailor made a dress using the popular 'classic' pattern *sika wo ntaban* - 'money has wings'. The design is a repeat motif of a swallow in flight, set against an oval background. The name of the *cloth* is a caution to use money prudently because if mismanaged it can fly away.

Akosua continued,

> So the tailor sewed [the dress] with the bird flying down, and when my friend saw it she was like 'Fine, no problem.' But then her mother was so furious when she saw her. She had to go back to the tailor and make the dress again so the bird was flying up. You see, somebody will think you're desecrating the cloth. You know, before you couldn't even wear *big cloth* in some trendy style. If you wear something strappy someone might get angry with you because you should sew a serious style, something that won't go out of fashion. But me, I'm not interested in that stuff. I like colors. There are so many bright colors now in the market. I just pick colors.

Akosua's story is a common example of how young people are perceived to be misusing or misinterpreting classic *prints* and, subsequently, subject to censure. Her story also highlights how *African print* fashions are interpreted in different, in this case, conflicting ways from older cultural traditions. Increasingly, the symbolism and social value of 'classic' *prints* are secondary to affordability, expanded color combinations, and the possibilities of creating trendy styles. It is important to note that

[356] It is unclear whether younger people will learn more about *cloth* names as they age, or if a tradition is slowly fading. My time in the field suggested it is perhaps the latter.

contestations about *print* fashion do not map neatly to oppositions between the economically privileged versus the poor, young versus old, trendy versus traditional but, rather, unfold in overlapping and conflicting references to tastes, cultural references, and social positions. Meaning, a young person may be fond of fashion and dress novelty and still lament the decline of naming traditions. Similarly, an older person may be fashionable and unaware of the names of 'classics', or unconcerned with the decline in naming *prints*. What I wish to suggest is that knowledge and value of longstanding meanings is associated more with older women, whereas knowledge and value of fashion is associated more with youthful women.

The availability of inexpensive *print* encourages experimentation with new styles and products, as evidenced by the variety of *African print* earrings, necklaces, hats, belts, shoes, blazers, bathing suits, strapless dresses, pencil skirts, tapered pants and the like now in vogue. The use of *African print* is not restricted to clothing; it is fast expanding into interior decoration, with its bright colors featuring as accents and centerpieces of bowls, cushions, couches, lampshades and the like. Online, in shops, boutiques and roadside kiosks, there now exists a wide and expanding array of *African print* clothing, accessories and kitsch items.[357] The fashion-first, or 'fashionista', view leading this transformation of *print* celebrates the artistic potential of consumers and designers, and places high value on creativity and ingenuity. *Print* products exist in expensive and affordable varieties, made for the tastes and budgets of consumers across age groups and classes. Although *African print* fashions are not the monopoly

[357] Key chains, stationary, phone and tablet cases, table mats, picture frames, purses, travel bags and the like are some of the ways 'cheap' *print* has expanded in mass markets. *African print* covers and accents are pervasive, and their 'look' adds a touch of 'Africa' to anything. There are multiple different markets for these items, and in-depth analysis of these market segments is beyond the scope of this project.

of a single class segment, consumers in the upper (middle) classes have the most access to changing fashions. With more disposable income than poor consumers and people in the lower middle classes, economically privileged consumers can afford to change fashions whimsically and frequently; their wardrobes expand with trends and with each passing social events. For the middle classes *African print* is an important visible material for projects of self-identification and cultural distinctiveness. In wearing *African print,* middle classes are at once distinguishing themselves from 'Western' dress forms, as well as the least privileged social groups that primarily purchase second-hand clothing. As such, consumers in the middle classes have a disproportionately loud voice in claiming meanings of *African print* fashion and dress practices. Whether producing for popular fashion or high-end consumers, the creativity and entrepreneurial efforts of a range of tailors and fashion designers is critical to the production of *African print* fashion in the new market. I turn in the following section to the cultural production of tailors and members of the fashion industry.

Tailoring, Design, and the Culture of Creativity

Perched on the edge of her single bed, Dziffa explained what she planned to do after she finished law school. She raised her voice above alternating sharp bangs and muffled thumps. Three men in the hallway of her dorm building were fixing something, she wasn't sure what. The room she shared with one other woman was small and dimly lit but, she assured me, was a vast improvement to her last housing assignment. Married with three children Dziffa was eager to finish her law program and return to her family. I inquired about her *African print* business and her work as a designer. "Well I'm not really a designer," she protested, "I just happened to get into it

by accident. I like various styles of cloth and whenever my friends used to see me they'd say I like your dress. And after some time, they asked me to make something for them. I'd take a foreign-designed dress, like a ready-made, then I'd turn it into a local *print* dress. So that's how I got into it."

Before law school, she worked at a bank, and when the government instituted 'Friday Wear' all the employees began wearing what she described as "smart-casual" *African print* to work on Fridays. Her eyes lit up as she explained, "It could be anything made out of *print:* a maxi dress, cat suit, play suit, anything made out of *cloth.* So when I left my job and I came to school I had a lot of these clothes because I used to wear them every Friday. But my mates here, most of them are just out of school and they don't really have things like that. So any time I wear *cloth* it fascinates them, and I just thought of making a few things for them."

Dziffa works with four different atelier garment producers and turns a modest profit. She clarified, "I don't make a lot of income, just enough to run around." Like many other professionals and students in Accra, designing and selling *African print* products is a side business for Dziffa. "Everyone has to have a side hustle", she explained. In addition to clothing, she sells hand-made *African print* sandals, earrings, clutch purses and hairpins – each item meticulously styled and finished. She pulled out matching purses and sandals from a large sisal bag and arranged them carefully on her bed. "It isn't hard to make them. You just shape the cardboard from the beginning. A long time ago, I learned millinery, you know, like hat making, and it's almost the same thing for making purses. I saw someone make a purse some time ago and when I saw how she went about doing it I said, 'I can do this myself'. And I just started doing it." She planned to make *African print* rings next, "They're very popular among young girls nowadays," she informed me. With a strong entrepreneurial and creative spirit,

Dziffa's limiting factor, she suggested, was time and the challenge of balancing law school, family life, and a growing 'side hustle'.

I probed her knowledge of the *African print* market and she responded quickly and confidently. She knew different brand names, where they were manufactured and differences in quality. She spoke with excitement about how *cloth* was growing the garment industry and expanding creative possibilities.

> I think it's just our way of life here. You can wear it anywhere; do anything you want with it. Now you're not restricted. In the past it used to be like a restriction, you just wear it to church or to the market. But now you can do so many things and you're not restricted as to how to use *cloth*. Now I wear *cloth* to any function. You can add lace to make it more elegant, you can add chiffon and all that. So it's like a breakaway from the traditional connotation of *cloth*. Now it's more, let's say, fashionable in that sense because you can combine it with so many things. Even on the runway people have changed it to avant-garde styles. So you're not really restricted. Even with your jeans, people do patchwork on jeans with *cloth*. I think it's now just a way of life.

Like other respondents, Dziffa identified the 'Friday Wear' policy as a turning point in local *print* fashion and its acceptance into social spaces from which it was previously barred. Somewhat ironically, 'traditional dress' for 'Friday Wear' opened the door for old dress styles, values, and conventions to be challenged, revamped and revised by creative consumers and ad-hoc designers, like Dziffa, who draw styles and inspiration from multiple sources. As Victoria Rovine (2009) describes African fashion designers and consumers more generally, they draw together dress forms and styles from "outside their immediate orbit, [and make] these forms their own."[358]

Those 'in fashion' dress the body in flattering ways using tailored and, or, designer label clothing. Popular and elite fashion markets use *African print* widely as a signature 'African' look; an aesthetic announcing 'African' creative sensibilities. In

[358] Rovine 2009: 135

Accra, the language of 'designer' versus 'tailor' reproduces a hierarchy in the field of fashion that bestows on the former greater status and presumed aesthetic and cultural capital. Both fashion designers and tailors are artisanal apparel producers, yet clothing produced by the former is framed as 'art', while the latter is viewed with less regard as a 'craft' or 'vocational' industry. Additionally, fashion designers are legitimized by their brands, or labels, as well as the public recognition of enthusiasts and experts who wear designer clothing and publish comments in print and online fashion spreads. The language of 'exclusivity', 'refinement' is associated with designer clothing. Showing collections at key industry events becomes a way for fashion designers to further consolidate aesthetic capital and be consecrated in Accra's field of fashion.

At the time of fieldwork, the eponymous labels of Kofi Ansah, Ozwald Boateng, and Joyce Ababio were well established, and others such as B'ExotiQ, Nallem, Kaela Kay, Abrantie Clothing, Kiki Clothing, Duaba Serwa, Ohema Ohene, Love April, Christie Brown, and Sika Designs were gaining greater (international) recognition.[359] A majority of these designers use *African print* in innovative ways that appeal to local and international dress tastes and styles. With bases and retail outlets in world cities, including London, Los Angeles, New York, and Ghana, a new generation of Ghanaian designers seem poised to make an indelible mark on world

[359] Kofi Ansah was Ghana's leading designer for many years. He passed away in May 2014. Ansah trained at the Chelsea School of Art in London, and caught the attention of people in the fashion industry in Europe with his use of *African print* and other Ghanaian fabrics with European styles. As Ansah explained using the metaphor of a diamond, "It's a rock, but if you cut it and [shine] enough surface that's when it turns it captures the light and it glitters, it becomes valuable…We need to show the world the usage of our prints" to shine in international fashion http://journalism.nyu.edu/publishing/archives/livewire/fashion/fashion_piece/. Other important established designers include London-based Oswald Boateng, Bee Arthur, Ben Nonterah, and Kwesi Nti. At the time of fieldwork, Ghanaian luxury fashion brand, Christie Brown, was producing signature *African print* accents and embellishments in collections, specifically *African print* strips and buttons fashioned into elaborate necklaces and elegantly draped sashes. Another young label, Duaba Serwa, had gained prominence with predominantly *African print* collections in 2011, and received awards at African Fashion Week as well as in London, Paris and New York. Christie Brown and Duaba Serwa are exemplary of emerging or up-and-coming Ghanaian designers gaining local and international attention.

fashion. Fashion designers aspire to make names for themselves in Accra and to receive recognition at international fashion weeks and high-prestige fashion cities. Success in Ghana's industry is desirable, but more cultural and social capital attaches to 'making it' internationally. In interviews, designers described varying paths to fashion: some grew up in sewing families, some are 'self-taught' and 'learned on the job', and a smaller number possess fashion degrees from prestigious institutions in London, Paris, New York and Los Angeles. One designer after another expressed passion for their work, belief in their entrepreneurial skills, and challenges trying to win over discouraging family members, industry critics, and fashion gatekeepers.

In the case of an industrious woman I call Abena, the racial dynamics of fashion was a recurring challenge in her fashion career. Abena had worked for several *African print* brands in Ghana and, over the course of twelve years of her career, moved from sales and marketing, to sourcing and textiles design. She casually referenced her degree in fashion design from a top school in the UK, and spoke with confidence and clarity about the art and business of international fashion. Her stories flowed from sourcing buttons in China to conceptualizing prêt-à-porter clothing lines in Ghana, opening textiles shops in Nigeria, and back to the complexity of navigating racial tensions.

Abena explained that during the time she worked at a fashion house in London she felt mistreated by European nationals and yearned to return to Ghana. Once back in Accra, she found herself reporting to British, Dutch, Chinese, Lebanese, and Indian supervisors who questioned her skills and judgment. She summarized the problem saying, "These companies act like they're giving back to Ghana by employing factory labor, but then they don't want Ghanaian managers." Working with West Africans presented its own challenges. As she recounted, "It's hard when some of the most

suspicion and resistance I've faced has come from other Ghanaians, and Nigerians. It's that crabs in a bucket mentality, you know? And, it's often in those moments when you need to close a deal and someone looks at you like, 'Who the hell are you?' In those moments, it comes down to who you know, not how much you know." Passion, Abena explained, was the only thing that kept her in the world of fashion. As the interview concluded, she talked about her next fashion projects, and thumbed through a large sketchbook. Clearly, creative talent and strong drive also kept her in the world of fashion.

While individual efforts shape the field of fashion in Ghana, particular institutions aim to influence. With 10,000 views daily and 800,000 Facebook followers (without using paid adverts), the website FashionGHANA.com claims to be "Ghana's most popular fashion media" and a leader of fashion on the African continent more generally.[360] FashionGHANA sponsors a number of Ghana's major industry events including 'Accra Fashion Week', which was first launched in 2012 as 'Ghana Fashion & Design Week'. Now held annually, the event aspires to operate like the fashion weeks in the major fashion capitals – Paris, Milan, London, New York – and to expand Ghana's fashion infrastructure. 'Accra Fashion Week' extends the reach of Ghanaian designers into the international fashion industry and, simultaneously, assists foreign designers to expand into African markets.

Featured collections range from 'wearable' clothing and accessories, to impractical 'avant-garde' 'art'. A less 'wearable' example was shown by Hamburg-based Sarah Duah whose 2012 collection was made primarily of hair extensions dyed different colors, stitched, and braided into unusual forms and styles. Her collection received compliments from one blogger who described it as 'hard art street fashion',

[360] About AFWk. http://www.accrafashionweek.org/about-afwk/ Accessed March 30, 2017

and the collection was also viciously critiqued as 'hideous' 'nonsense' on the popular Nigerian fashion website Bellanaija.[361] Whether considered 'art', 'high fashion', 'edgy' or 'commercial' everything at Accra Fashion Week is to be captured, critiqued, and sold. The 2016 hashtag, #thebuyersopportunity, reinforces the event's central goal, which is to 'maximize sales'.

Models are central to fashion shows; their bodies act as canvas, and clothing as the art material. Ranking of models reproduces beauty hierarchies in which 'models' are placed above the general public and 'super models' positioned at the very top. Within the general public, beauty is also ranked. Beautiful people are granted greater social visibility that, increasingly in contemporary markets, can evolve into employment opportunities. The expansion of social media celebrities and reality TV stars has turned being beautiful into a career choice for some, especially women. Elaborate grooming practices regulate body size, hair, and blemishes, and are of utmost importance in beauty-related careers.

In the fashion industry, models embody confidence and personify style. They express their power in 'looks', 'walks' and 'poses'. Models are at the center of *African print* high fashion campaigns, their bodies enact the aesthetics and values of textiles brands and fashion designers.[362] Photographs of models capture beauty, style, and confidence, and put body parts on display in high-resolution images; photos are up-close on faces, figures, legs, breasts, and behinds all placed under scrutiny. Multiple shots produce variation of the same content from 'better angles', showing 'looks' from the 'front' and 'back'. The presentation of models and production of high fashion links directly to the employment of photographers, make-up artists, hair stylists, and

[361] See https://accradotalttours.wordpress.com/2012/10/11/ghana-fashion-design-week-sarah-duah/ and https://www.bellanaija.com/2012/10/2012-ghana-fashion-design-week-sarah-duah/

[362] Within months of starting fieldwork, I began to see faces I recognized at fashion events, which indicated that the pool of working models was rather small at the time.

other 'behind the scenes' workers who construct runways, plan events, work in hospitality, and coordinate fashion shoots. Fashion media inspires self-governing practices among consumers that imitate, or attempt, the beauty ideals models embody; eyebrows and ankles, poses and *African prints* are placed under the scrutiny of admiring and critical consumers.

Fashion and beauty professions are growing but precariously so. Industry tenuousness was evident in tensions between models and organizers of the 2015 Mercedes-Benz African Fashion Festival in Accra. Hours before the show, selected and rehearsed models backed out and boycotted the event for what they named as 'exploitation' and unfair treatment. Reports suggested that models based in Accra had not received payments promised for transportation and rehearsals, while airfare and expensive accommodations were covered for models living outside of Ghana. Boycotting models suggested that compensation had been a problem at event in the preceding year as well. Apparently, some models who worked the event in 2014 received no compensation or lower remuneration than initially negotiated. Responding to these allegations of underpayment and exploitation, the event organizers, the Global Ovations Group, reported delays in corporate sponsorship for the event and stalled cash flows. Organizers disclosed that the event was not, in fact, sponsored by Mercedes-Benz (it was simply using the name) and, despite inviting prominent fashion industry players to attend, the event's budget was evidently inadequate. Models, it seemed, bore the brunt of the shortfall.

In interviews, women working in fashion retail reported experiences of sexual harassment from supervisors and male clients. A beautiful, slender woman wearing the form-fitting *African print* uniform given to her by her employer explained, "Some of the girls here they will do anything for trinkets. They [male clients] think I am the

same way, but I am not." She spoke openly about the expected exchange of 'favors' for the 'good life', while her co-workers jeered and suggested "she doesn't know how to use what God gave her." The shop she worked in retailed designer *African print* clothing for men and women, and was attended to by four young women, each slender, beautiful, and shapely.

While fashion retail and fashion shows display *African print* on the bodies of tall and thin black women, noticeably different bodies wear *African print* on the streets. In Accra, women are, on average, much shorter than models, often quite squat. Their curves defy the straight lines of fashion models, and flesh fills the body form. Facial features and bodies on the street are so much more varied and unruly than fashion advertising suggests. The idealized woman in West African popular culture is 'thicker' than the typical fashion models, has an hourglass figure, and pronounced buttocks. Ghanaian entertainment host, Jocelyn Dumas, rose to celebrity because her beauty and body personify this ideal. Contrasting Ms. Dumas to professional models illustrates how Ghana's fashion models reproduce a much more 'European' body ideal than the bodies most celebrated in Accra. Whether slim or shapely, the bodies most celebrated in *African print* fashion are of young women. Their cultural capital is manifests in fashion knowledge and competence which, seemingly, qualifies them to make value judgments about dress. Young women are asserting more influence in defining fashion in blogs and magazines, and setting trends by using their bodies to display 'what's hot'. As an editor of the upmarket magazine Glitz put it, "The young and talented are taking over."[363]

African print representations in street catalogs, magazines, and the fashion posters hanging on the walls of ateliers also inspire. In Accra, street hawkers and

[363] Glitz Magazine 2015

vendors zigzag through traffic selling fashion catalogs and glossy magazines showing off fashions at 'high society' events; specifically, what the 'rich and famous' wore to recent weddings, parties, shows, red carpet events, etc. At the time of fieldwork a variety of glossy fashion magazines with print and online versions circulated.[364] One example, the popular upmarket glossy magazine *Agoo,* captures outfits and attendance at high-society weddings and events, and appeals to a wide range of consumers interested in the lifestyles of Ghana's rich, royalty, and beautiful. Catering to a different consumer segment, *Classic Magazine,* which describes itself as "100% African Fashion", provides the latest news on African fashion worldwide, and promotes Ghanaian fashion designers and events. *Classic* describes itself as 'African' and 'Ghanaian', moving without explanation between the two referents. As the magazine's Chief Executive explained, *Classic* was launched to "generate revenue for the country [Ghana] through fashion" and to educate "African readers" on fashion, travel, tourism, and beauty. In both magazines, *African print* shields curves and supports cleavage, and is rivaled only by the resplendent styles and symbolism of *kente cloth.*

Popular fashion catalogs imported from Nigeria are also popular; they are easy to detect because of the cost in *naira* printed on their covers, and the appearance of different textiles than in Ghana. Fashion photography in magazines representing Nigeria's fashion world capture men and women in colorful outfits made predominantly from lace, *aso oke,* damask, *India George*, voile and, to a lesser degree, *African print*, or as they call it, *Ankara.* Outfits in Nigerian catalogs are heavily-

[364] At the time of fieldwork, popular titles including Arise, Agoo, New African Woman, Ovation, and African Vibes, and Glam Africa, had publishing bases in a variety of cities, including Accra, Lagos, London, and New York. Glossy magazines are notoriously difficult to make maintain and make profitable, and high magazine turnover is expected in fashion and in the digital age. Accordingly, titles that stay in business accumulate even greater cultural capital.

embroidered, beaded, glimmering with sequins and, frequently, topped off with impeccably tied headwraps (*gele*) and stylish hats. By comparison, the women in Ghanaian catalogs wear much more *African print*, their jewelry is smaller, and fewer heads are wrapped.

Unlike corporate or designer 'lookbooks', street catalogs do not sell particular *African print* textiles or brands; their product is fashion inspiration. Models in street catalogs and fashion posters showcase ideas and creative possibilities for consumers and tailors to discuss. During fieldwork, I encountered catalogs describing themselves as 'The Ultimate In Fashion & Style' and 'Classic Fashion', and challenging consumers to 'Dare to be trendy', and 'Posh', 'Classy', 'Fabulous', and 'Always steps ahead'. On display were creative ways to use *African print* with ruffles, ruching, frills, high-to-low skirts and halter neck tops; mini-, maxi-, A-line, and fishtail skirts; structured, loose, and wrapped dresses; off-the-shoulder and strapless outfits. Street catalogs and magazines construct notions of beauty, femininity, ideal body shape and size, and beliefs about 'African' fashion. The bodies used to model are fuller than bodies in high fashion advertising.

Importantly, styles in street catalogs and fashion posters are intended to be copied, intended as visual templates for tailors. As *African print* clothing is typically custom-made, tailors and consumers need inspiration and guidance through the production process. To show tailors the styles they wish to reproduce, consumers report using smart phones to photograph fashion on television and computer screens; they rip pages out of magazines; and take ready-made clothing to tailors as samples. In addition, consumers sketch and describe the clothing they desire.

Tailoring involves a wide range of workers of different genders, ages, education levels, and socio-economic backgrounds, whose work constitutes a vibrant

crafts industry and atelier culture. Whereas custom-ordered clothing is prohibitively expensive for mass markets in Europe and the United States, the labor of tailors in West and Central Africa is generally affordable, which enables mass-customized clothing markets. In Ghana, ateliers are on practically every street; located in well-established commercial centers, in the back rooms of residential buildings, in makeshift wooden structures with corrugated rooftops, and reconfigured shipping containers on the side of the side. For tailors and apprentices working in these spaces, *African print* relates directly to their livelihood and creative expression; *print* means survival and self-actualization.

Tailors and fashion designers touch clients as they take measurements, they ask practical questions about consumer desires regrading sleeves, lining and lapels. Their job is to produce clothing that exactly replicates or creatively interprets consumer requests. This intimate, dialogic exchange between consumers and tailors is critical to *African print* dress practices; it drives textiles consumption, enables Friday Wear rituals, and enables tailors and consumers to make meaning of *African print* through creative production. In short, it unleashes creative potential.

As a middle-aged man I call Edem expressed it: "Me, personally, I have a little artistic something in me. So, I tell my tailor I want this shirt to be designed like this. I may not say put red here, but I will ask him to design the pocket in this way." He ran two fingers round his collar as he spoke, grazing the top of his shirt. At the time, Edem was wearing a button-down *print* shirt with a Nehru collar and flap pocket on the left side; a fitted pair of knee-length shorts in matching *print* hugged his thighs. Still touching his collar, he explained, "I might tell him this should be high up close to my neck, and I want to button it, and I want to see the *print* design in the front part of the shirt but not the back. But then my tailor will look at the colors of the fabric and say

this part of the design will go for the pocket or the sleeves." Edem explained that on occasion he lets his tailor dictate the cut and style of his clothing but, most times, he provides details about what he wants.

Communication between tailors and clients is easily scrambled, and tensions frequently arise over how and when clothing was supposed to be finished. Also, because skills of tailors vary, execution of an agreed upon style is sometimes poor and consumers are left disappointed and angry about the final product. It is common to hear that someone's *cloth* was 'spoiled' and they are looking for a new tailor. It seems, the best tailors are talked about in whispers and recommended by word of mouth. Once their good reputation spreads, skillful tailors are quickly inundated with new clients and the pressures of tight deadlines.[365] As demand expands, good tailors often employ apprentice labor and lose control of the high quality for which are known; concerns about 'spoiled' *cloth* re-emerge as unflattering styles and shoddy cuts are sewn.[366]

Some tailors take more ownership of the creative process and provide careful consultation to consumers about textiles and dress choices. As a tailor I call Efua explained, many decisions go into producing flattering and appropriate clothing. As she put it:

> "I have to look at the design in the fabric or the style they want the design to be made into. If let's say you're some kind of an executive, or you're very conservative, you need to get certain fabrics that go with your personality. Otherwise you make the dress and you won't even wear it, or it won't be appropriate where you're wearing it to…And if you're fat you don't wear fabrics that have bold, big patterns in them because it will blow you up. Or you don't wear *cloth* that is too loud. You could just have a scarf or something that will put a little style in you. But if you go all orange and you don't know how

[365] On average, tailors will turn around an order in a week. At the time of fieldwork, long power outages were interrupting the turnaround time for tailors. Neighborhoods experienced unannounced outages for twenty-four even forty-eight hours.

[366] When space and capital allow, tailors work in small teams that include apprentices as well as paid employees. Compensation for apprentices is experience, and employees are paid per piece.

> to walk in it and translate it into fashion, you'll be doing the wrong thing. I mean, you'll be sending the wrong signals. And even the cut. Look at me, most of the time I'll wear something that has a band so that I have a waistline because I'm big around here. [*She gestured to her waist].* So, I give myself more definition here, and then probably some flare. Not too wide, probably an A-line. Something that will give me what I don't have."

Efua gave style tips and noted her attention to matching *print* designs with each client's personality, profession, body shape and size: every component custom-fit to reflect the client's sense of style and to boost self-confidence.

I interviewed Efua in a small two-room building that she rented from a family member; the front room was set up as a boutique and the back room as her studio. When I asked about the ready-made *African print* hanging on racks in the boutique Efua explained that she keeps an inventory of approximately fifty items, "just in case clients want to grab and go." However, the majority of her business is customized and created with her consultation. "What I advise my clients to do is to come and have a discussion about what they want, and then they go and buy the *cloth."* She acknowledged that many tailors don't advise clients as closely as she does, and explained that she takes particular pride in perfecting her clothing: "For me, I don't just see *cloth* as material. I see it as an art piece. It should be a finished artwork when you're done." To be sure, Efua's clothing is stunning, meticulously and skillfully crafted. However, when asked if she considers herself a designer, she shook her head vigorously, furrowed her brow and said, "Me, I just sew."

Efua's situation highlights the difficulty of labeling 'tailors' and 'fashion designers'; lived experience does not map easily onto pre-defined terms. Efua is a tailor, designer, artist, consultant, salesperson, and entrepreneur. Efua is a one-woman shop. Her consultation and customization exemplify disalienated labor in *African print* dress markets – for better or worse, she determines the conditions and products of her labor. Contrary to theories of globalization that highlight growing standardization and

alienation, *African print* garment producers remains connected to products of their labor as well as consumers. 'Flexible specialization' in West Africa relates to small batch and niche production, as well as individual, customized tailoring services. While this mode of production creates possibilities and freedoms, it also produces significant pressures and risks. As Efua succinctly put it: "This shop is for me. I have to try my hardest all the time."

The Internet expands the reach of *African print* fashion across class and geography, and creates a more extensive online community of 'Africans'. On social media, consumers dressed in *African print* are on display. Especially on Instagram and Pinterest, photographs of consumers mimic poses from high fashion photography; women stand with hands on their hips or resting lightly on their thighs, elbows pulled away from their bodies, and chests folded in or hyperextended out. Duck lips, the proverbial pout, are a common feature. Extensive education about cultural dress practices occurs in the online community of 'African' fashionistas. Social media enables conventionally beautiful women – with symmetrical faces, slim or voluptuous hour-glass figures, and even-toned skin – to increase the popularity of their personal brand or business by photographing their bodies dressed in *African print*.

For example, a young woman I interviewed, who I will call Araba, described herself as a fashion designer and explained, "You have to know how to take pictures. Especially your arm, you have to hold your arm like this." Her hand met her hip; she rolled her shoulders forward and dipped her chin towards her collarbone. It was a well-practiced move. Araba models the clothes she makes and posts them on social media. She explained, "I started posting my clothes on Pinterest and so many people liked what I posted. So now I make them and send to my sister in [the] U.S. and she

sells them." Araba's Pinterest account is full of 'selfies' and photos in front of mirrors while she poses and shows off beautiful *African print* clothing.

A search for 'African fashion' on Pinterest yields thousands of photos of women, men, and children wearing *African print.* Tags describe the fabric variably as *African print, wax print, Ankara, and kitenge,* and display a wide range of styles described as 'everyday', 'weekend specials', 'chic', 'glamorous', 'faultless', 'stunning', and 'unique', among many other laudatory adjectives.[367] As much as photos show off, they also inspire. As Araba described, she frequently sees styles on other Pinterest accounts and imitates them with her own modifications and interpretation. In fact, *African print* consumers, tailors, and fashion designers take 'inspiration' from multiple sources. As with fashion elsewhere, very little in *African print* fashion is original, consumers and designers 'borrow' liberally in the new market to remake their style.

The Semiotics and Feelings of African Print

As the dominant lingua franca in the world of fashion and dress in Ghana, *African print* signals varied individual and social messages. In addition, *print* dress practices construct temporary attachment to a subject position identified as 'African'. The historical record is unclear about when *wax print* was first identified as 'African', and whether the term '*African print'* inspired or reflected association with 'Africa'. Regardless which came first, *African print* is now strongly associated with the 'African idea' (wa Thiong'o 2009), and the imagined community of 'Africa'. [368]

[367] *Kitenge* is a Kiswahili word used for *African print* in parts of East and Central Africa.
[368] The 'African idea' traces back to the diaspora and Pan-African movements in the first half of the Twentieth Century. Contrary to Achille Mbembe's notion that 'Africa' is constructed by Europe, N'gugi wa Thiong'o (2009) suggests that the 'African idea' was formulated by diaspora Africans looking to build connections back to a motherland from which they were forcibly separated.

Referencing the translation of newspapers and novels into local vernacular in Sixteenth Century Europe, Benedict Anderson (1983) suggests that print-capitalism "made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways."[369] There is an easy translation to make here with *African print* capitalism, which is that the spread of *African print* textiles/dress practices in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries made it possible for Africans and Black people across continental Africa and Diaspora communities to relate to themselves across a wide range of other cultural, national, ethnic, gender, and class affiliations.

I suggest that the 'reading' of *African print* dress creates an imagined community of 'Africa' across mass publics and expansive (inter)national markets. *African print* dress unifies 'African' people through productive relations, a 'technology of communications', and its linguistic diversity.[370] Tailors and consumers in West Africa constitute the most significant productive relations of *African print* dress. The 'technology of communications' refers here to myriad ways *African print* communicates social messages through naming patterns, state policies, corporate marketing and branding, and print and online fashion media. The linguistic diversity of *African print* dress refers to its capacity to speak across dress languages and shared vernacular, and signal membership in ethnic, regional, national, familial, and cultural groups.

As an analytic and folk category, 'Africa' includes and consolidates a vast number of communities and cultures. *African print* sartorial practices act as material

[369] Anderson 1983:36

[370] Anderson's text argues for "a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity" (Anderson 1983:42). By fatality he is referencing the importance of print capitalism in creating mass reading publics using shared vernacular.

symbol of people with shared interest in 'Africa' and shared valuing of 'African' cultural practices. On black bodies, *African print* dress in the streets, at social events, in office spaces, fashion shows and media is 'read' as a signal of 'African' culture rooted in everyday life.[371] The myriad social contexts in which *African print* features, and the bodies it shields, contour 'African society' and map the 'social landscape'. [372] Use of *African print* for 'traditional dress' as well as 'African' fashion conjures 'Africa' from the distant past, 'Africa' as represented by the fashion industry, and 'Africa' in the future promise of entrepreneurship and so-called 'emerging markets'.

At the same time, fashion regularly remakes *African print,* perhaps not in the daily ephemerality of the newspaper but with similar 'inbuilt obsolescence' and 'mass ceremony' replicated by millions of people whose identity cannot be known (Anderson 1983:35). *African print* fashion enables 'Africans' in Ghana and other parts of the African continent, Europe, Asia, and North America to claim the same identity category even if they do not know or relate to one another directly. The 'Africa' *African print* conjures 'feels' real, even as it is imagined. As Hall explains, identities emerge from the process of narrating the self, which is necessarily fictional, "imaginary (as well as symbolic)…always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field" (Hall 1996:4).

More specifically, *African print* clothing evokes positive feelings relating to 'Africa'; feelings of 'pride' 'beauty', and 'confidence'. Fashion elements contribute to feelings of confidence, as models and consumers 'strut their stuff'. In the unapologetic

[371] Anderson argues that commodities like sugar and textiles did not affect consumer subjects in the way that print – like newspapers and novels – did because sugar and textiles are not cultural forms, they are simply measured (Anderson 1983:43). Anderson misses the qualitative difference between textiles and sugar – one is intimately pressed against the skin and constitutive of subjectivity, the other is central to social and personal life but rarely subjectivity. Put differently, few people say, "I eat sugar to express who I am."

[372] In the novels Anderson describes, protagonists are taken through 'society' or a 'sociological landscape' that fuses the world of the novel with national imaginings (Anderson 1983:30).

command of their bodies and fashion sensibilities, models and consumers construct repeated associations between *African print,* 'Africa', and 'confidence'. (See Appendix D for examples of confident presentations of body and fashion from Accra Fashion Week, 2012.)

Identification with 'Africa' is amplified by 'written clothing' in the form of designer taglines associates *print* with an imagined 'Africa'. At the time of fieldwork, popular fashion label taglines included:

- **"Afrochic: Get Compliments"**
- **"Afrocentric Fashion for Kids & Adults"**
- **"An Introduction to Modern Africa"**
- **"Transforming African Fabric into Chic, Elegant, Sophisticated Clothing"**

By calling *African print* clothing made in Ghana 'African', 'Afrochic' and 'Afrocentric', designers reproduce the common perception of an aesthetic difference between 'African' and 'Western' clothing, and simultaneously recognize that *African print* is not autochthonous, like *kente cloth* and *batakari.* Presumably, using the language of 'Africa' and 'Afrocentricity' also invites wider patronage of products by consumers across continental Africa and Diaspora communities. These abstract racial and cultural constructions of difference are central to the process of selling *African print.* Designer taglines are aspirational and descriptive, they mix customs from the fashion industry with cultural references; signaling too much and too little at once. For example, Accra-based label SharpeCookie GH describes itself with the baffling construction: "Vintage, modern African wear." The label carries *African print* clothing and accessories and, in its marketing, displays fashion-forward 'looks'. The mere use of *African print,* it suggests, somehow sufficiently explains the meaning of "vintage, modern African" clothing.

Additionally, in the global fashion industry, 'Africa' or 'traditional Africa' is deployed in ways that associate goods with an ancient and exotic community. Rovine (2009) argues that French fashion and textile designers "combined, adapted and, in some instances, invented African forms" in order to construct popular notions of 'traditional African' dress that could then be incorporated into French fashion markets. [373] Paradoxically, the crystallization of reification of 'African' styles inspires new fashion trends in France and gives 'African' materials commercial value in international fashion markets.[374] The labeling of certain styles as authentically 'African' relies on exaggerating or distorting the representativeness of certain textiles and dress forms.

'Africa' is also deployed as a stereotype in international fashion. For example, in 2012 the Haitian-Italian designer and former model Stella Jean launched her eponymous label at Milan Fashion Week with a collection comprised almost entirely of *African print*. Describing her collection, Vogue UK suggested: "Jean has established her signature aesthetic as a merging of the exoticism of her creole heritage and the craftsmanship of her Italian roots. The result is classic feminine tailoring - cinched-in waists and dirndl skirts infused with bold tribal prints and colour."[375] The perceived 'exoticism' of Haiti and the conjuring of 'tribal prints' reproduces Eurocentric cultural messaging about Haiti as a distant, different, and 'exotic' place from Euro-American cultural centers. Moreover, the language of 'tribal' is problematic; *African print* is woven into ethnic cultural dress practices and social life,

[373] Rovine 2009:45
[374] Rovine traces this practice back to France's colonial enterprise, which simultaneously aimed to 'civilize' its 'primitive' subjects and incorporate their practices into French culture. In the current fashion scene, French designers try to appeal to general interest in 'international' looks, as well as local French consumers who trace their heritage to African cultures.
[375] http://www.vogue.co.uk/spy/biographies/stella-jean-biography Accessed September 20, 2015

but it is not representative of a particular 'tribe' or ethnic group.[376] It is unlikely Vogue UK's use of 'tribal' refers specifically to Ga, Akan, Ewe or other ethnic groups. More likely, 'tribal' in this context relies on stereotypes of 'tribal Africa'.

The danger of reproducing stereotypes of 'tribal Africa' is illustrated by internationally acclaimed fashion designer Junya Watanabe's "Africa-inspired" Spring 2016 collection. Watanabe hired mostly white male models (no models of African descent), fitted them with braided and dreadlocked hair extensions, and dressed them in patchwork *African print* shirts and khaki shorts. Models were accessorized with Masai necklaces and other necklaces seemingly made of bone and horn. Watanabe's collection reproduces a colonial stereotype of 'Africa' at the same time as it excludes African and black models from international fashion.

By contrast, the 'African' community called upon through *African print* dress and fashion in Ghana is a cultural and racially marked construct premised on notions of difference from the 'West', and similarities, or connections, between continental and Diaspora Africans. The lived experience of *African print* in Ghana illustrates that we are not born 'African'; we become 'African' through the cultural practices, material realities, and imagining of *print* capitalism and its constructions of 'Africa' as a 'natural sort of being' (Butler 1990:33).[377]

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[376] Of course Akan, Ga, Ewe, and other ethnic groups might talk about how their 'tribe' uses *African print,* but no 'tribe' can claim the textile as theirs. 'Tribe' is a vestige of colonially constructed social divisions, and while the language is used ubiquitously by Africans, it misleads and reproduces conceptions of African difference and inferiority. If we talked of the tribes in Europe rather than different ethnic groupings (Catalan, Roma etc.) different imagery would emerge.

[377][377] Referring to gender, Butler writes, "gender is always doing," expressing the ontological origins of gender in practices and experiences of the body (Butler 1990:25). 'African' cultural identity works similarly.

Conclusion

I have attempted in this chapter to illustrate how *African print* fashion is changing the world of dress in Ghana and creating possibilities for new material and symbolic meanings. *African print* fashion exhibits how socially differentiated cultural practices and contested meanings are remade in place. The culture of producing custom-made clothing enables people with artistic sensibilities to engage in fashion production as a 'side hustle', industry employee, or entrepreneurial venture, and as 'African' fashion grows so do economic and creative possibilities. The everyday fashions that discipline the body and identify subjects, simultaneously express personal style and socio-cultural values. Moreover, written clothing and the language of dress infuse *print* clothing with more meanings and create moments of imagining the self in relation to the abstract community of 'Africans'. As upper middle class segments of society are most active in buying, discarding, and replacing clothing to keep up with fashion trends, the tendency to claim 'Africa' through *African print* is especially prevalent in this fraction of the middle classes.

In the language of dress in West and Central Africa, *African print* is a widely understood vernacular with particular meanings across national boundaries and social landscapes. Across the African continent and worldwide Diasporas, a general 'African' community is also imagined through *African print* textiles and dress practices. While consumer and designer constructions of 'Africa' are strategic and imaginary, they are felt as real in the multiple and morphing ways that *African print* adorns black bodies and communicates ideas about 'African' culture, history, pride, and dignity. While men are certainly consumers and producers of *African print* fashion, women are at the center of dress practices. In the new fashion market, the principal dress subject is racialized, nationalized, gendered and entrepreneurial; she is

creative and self-consciously fashionable. Her body, dressed in *African print,* is the site of continuous remaking of what it means to be a beautiful, confident, and fashionable 'African'. As such, despite the foreign origins of *African print* textiles and the dominance of foreign manufacturers, *African print* emerges as a symbol of 'African' pride, a reflection of distinctively 'African' taste, and an expression of 'African' culture.

CONCLUSION

Hans Christian Anderson's famed tale recounts the story of a well-dressed Emperor with great fondness for new clothes. In the story, two crooks come to town claiming to weave a magnificent fabric that is invisible to anyone who is unfit for their position or unusually stupid.[378] The crooks pretend to weave fabric and make garments for the Emperor, who they dress in invisible clothes. As the Emperor's procession goes through town, common sense encourages silence. For fear of being labeled fools or embarrassing the Emperor, no one admits that he is naked until a child shouts out the obvious and reveals the ruse.

Anderson's tale illustrates how easily power is staged and reproduced through dress practices, discourses, and silences. Moreover, the story works as a loose allegory for contradictions of neoliberal development.[379] Thirty years ago, neoliberal ideas appeared as the new clothes, or cloak, of the world order; the world was wrapped with ideas about so-called 'free markets' and the necessity of 'competition' and 'choice' for economic growth and efficient market distribution. Now we live in the empire of capital, and the profit motive and logic of 'free markets' are established as common sense. In the face of growing inequality and the emergence of a global plutocracy, there is widespread fear and reluctance to speak truth to power; calling out capital can be uncomfortable and, for some, dangerous.

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[378] In the story, the Emperor instructs the crooks to weave the enchanted cloth so he can discern who in his kingdom is a fool or unfit for their position. The crooks set themselves to work pretending to weave a fabric with the finest patterns and colors. When they are finished, the Emperor looks at the empty loom and thinks, silently: "I can't see anything. This is terrible! Am I a fool? Am I unfit to be the Emperor?" Afraid to admit that he cannot see the cloth, the Emperor gives the fantasy fabric his highest praise. In the story, even as the child announces his nakedness and he begins to suspect the truth, the Emperor continues to walk proudly with his noblemen trailing behind holding his imaginary train.

[379] Another loose parallel is that, like the production in Anderson's tale, manufacturing in the global economy is largely invisible. Consumers demand new clothes without seeing the labor (and conditions) responsible for producing *African print* textiles.

In the case of *African print,* the naked truth of markets is that they are highly structured by the imperial past and contemporary concentrations of multinational capital. In reality competition and choice are considerably constrained. The myth of the 'free market' is maintained by historical silences and selective representations. Tracing material histories and market dynamics of *African print* markets breaks the silence regarding Dutch imperialism and cultural colonialism in West Africa, and sheds light on the few highly capitalized companies restructuring textiles market; it reveals expansions in entrepreneurial values, Euro-American corporate culture, and transforming provisioning for premium and mass markets. Significantly, unlike the Dutch 'craftsmen' lauded in Vlisco's marketing, *African print* producers in low-wage countries are largely invisible – the laborers who produce Hitarget, for example, are absent from the market politics and discourse of *African print* in Ghana. Very rarely do people ask about workers in China producing *African print* – Who are they? What are their conditions of labor? Rather than linking products to labor, brands serve as the intermediaries between *print* commodities and consumers; brands are the face of capital and low-wage labor is largely invisible.

Importantly, at the same time as we observe a few companies restructuring production, consumption of new *African print* clothes challenges conventional representations of 'traditional dress' and 'fashion'. *African print* emerged out of the exchange of indigenous material culture, industrial manufacturing, and imperial trade networks. As such, despite references to *print* textiles/dress as 'traditional', we see that textiles and dress in Ghana are not insular, stable, or locally derived; they point, instead, to cultural bricolage and the co-creation of 'traditions' through modern market exchange. Rather than fixing dress from Europe, or 'the West', and 'Africa' as oppositional, we can consider them relationally and provide detailed analysis that attempts to grasp the two regions' "complex interpenetration" (Gilroy 1993:48). Doing

so reveals complex entanglements of cultural dress markets, long histories of exchange across geographic and social space, and new forms of distinction, social stratification, and subjectivity.

Additionally, the lived experience of *African print* makes theory concrete and enables movement through levels of abstraction, the so-called 'detour through theory'.[380] As Wise (2003) explains: "The question of theory is a question of abstraction, but rather than becoming *more* abstract, one moves from the abstract (a general, simple idea) to the concrete (a highly differentiated, multiply determined idea). The concrete is not what is empirically given, but a necessary complexity. It is the result of theoretical work, not its origin. Take a concept and track its multiple material determinations and then you have the concrete…The detour through theory involves the movement back and forth across varying levels of abstraction."[381] As such, tracking *African print* not only allows us to challenge common sense about 'free markets', it also enhances our ability to relate empirical complexity in African contexts to theories and abstraction about 'neoliberal development'. Theory makes the world around us more intelligible and provides greater understanding of how social forces and varied forms of power shape experiences and ideas about 'African development'.

I started this project thinking about *African print* as a lens into neoliberal development. Following threads of *print* capitalism has revealed varied ways mass and niche markets in West Africa relate to textiles manufacturing in European and Asian countries; and how histories of imperialism, colonialism, and neoliberalism continue to shape material social life. For over one hundred and fifty years, industrial textiles

[380] Hall 2010:1791
[381] Wise 2003:107

have satisfied a range of cultural dress needs in West and Central Africa; reinforcing the fact of Africa's co-temporality with industrialization and capitalist development in other parts of the world.

The strategies of '*Dutch wax'* in the new market highlight the reproduction of imperial representations in corporate marketing, and the consolidation of economic, cultural, and aesthetic capital acquired through colonial domination. Moreover, imperial advantages in *print* markets are legitimated by a system of intellectual property rights that fails to credit people in Java and parts of West Africa for their creative production. Rather than framing *African print* textiles as premised on 'borrowing', the textiles discourse in Ghana celebrates the 'discovery' of Dutch companies, promotes a national narrative about 'traditional dress', and vilifies products from China as 'illegal' and 'counterfeit'. The lens of *African print* reveals changing relations in global manufacturing, specifically the growing dominance of manufacturers located in China in relation to producers in the Netherlands and Ghana.

Additionally, the expansion of (high) fashion practices and marketing further entangles corporatism and market common sense with 'African' dress practices. 'Africa' is deployed as inspiration and identification, materialized and enacted through *African print* fashion and dress practices, and used for personal and public expression. Increasingly, we construct answers to questions about 'who we are' in relation to the brands we buy. Whether recognized or not by *African print* consumers, the 'personal is political' and choices regarding which brands to purchase and 'what to wear' shape regional profits and national 'development'.

Fashion representations influence consumer choices and impact standards and norms of beauty. Whether fashion models are 'light' *and* 'dark' skinned, wearing 'natural' hair *and* weaves, skinny *and* full-figured, factors into *African print* politics. Legacies of racial hierarchies from slavery and colonialism persist in popular

consciousness, and are especially evident in the spheres of dress, fashion, and beauty. International fashion continues to be a highly racialized industry with centers of power and influence located primarily in Europe and the United States. Controversies surrounding the minimal representation and maximal exoticization of models of color highlight racial challenges in a white-dominated fashion world. Additionally, visual imagery in fashion advertisements is generally 'enhanced' through graphic design software such as Adobe Photoshop, creating unreal images of perfection. Critical perspectives of *African print* advertising and marketing are currently scarce, however, a different conversation becomes possible when the cultural politics and political economy of *African print* marketing are better known and debated.

Importantly, *African print* makes visible a range of populations and social relations typically underrepresented and underexplored in development studies. In particular, *African print* brings the labor of women in the beauty economies into view, as does pride in the dressed black body, and a whole culture of creativity related to tailoring in West and Central Africa. Furthermore, in Ghana, *African print* uncovers expansions in 'upper-' and 'middle class' retail infrastructure in the form of boutiques and malls, and related expansions in corporate retail practices. Social and geopolitical inequalities are reproduced in the hierarchies, symbolic meanings, and retailing of branded products – especially as 'luxury' brands invest in retail practices intended to create 'distance' between themselves and 'cheap' brands.

At a glance, we make meaning of (branded or designer) clothing and use it to signal identity; dress is our unique individual skin, as well as a reflection of the cultural and social landscape. As identification with 'Africa' emerges from shared 'feelings' of pride and confidence related to wearing *African print* dress, the community of 'Africa' is imagined through both 'traditional' and fashion forward styles. *African print* illustrates how markets satisfy cultural 'needs' and commodity

practices give meaning to cultural constructions – i.e. markets satisfy dress needs and dress practices give meaning to 'Africa'. *African print* gives meaning and material form to feelings of familiarity and fealty to a generalized community of 'Africans'. Dress vernaculars allow belonging claims to an imagined community of people living across continents and oceans, engaging each other through a fabric woven with memories of resistance and struggle, and cultural solidarity and pride.

Emotional attachments to *African print* do not translate to control of its production. Yet we know industrial production is not always linked to the symbolic meaning of products. Consider, for example, attachment to national flags; the location of a flag's production is much less important to the patriot than the flag's symbolic meanings. In the case of *African print,* future production looks likely to be dominated by producers in China. The structural imbalances in global textiles manufacturing and distribution, suggest that, in Ghana, comparative advantage lies in garment production and fashion. Tailors and fashion designers are expanding opportunities for creative expression and national economic growth, albeit in informal and precarious ways.

Eliminating structural imbalances is necessary to combat long histories and ongoing experiences of exploitation and extraction. However, in line with recent research (Picketty 2014), the lens of *African print* illustrates that inequality in the new market is growing rather than diminishing. The progressive polarization of wealth within and between countries relates to imperialism of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, as well as new world imperialist projects by the United States of America and the Republic of China. The contours of contemporary markets are especially shaped in relation to popular cultural markets in the U.S., and the exploitation of industrial labor and extraction of resources by Chinese interests. The expanding influence of China in African countries represents a new kind of power – one willing to invest in infrastructure and provision for poor consumers. However, Chinese

interests attempt to strategically control consumer and mineral markets in Africa and, ultimately, mirror familiar patterns of domination and extraction in African contexts.

In the present world order, nation states retain their power and influence, at the same time as multinational capital expands its influence over nation states, world markets, and social life. Regional and national inequalities are reproduced by 'business as usual' and the seemingly 'neutral' policies of the so-called 'free market'; the semblance of 'fair' and effective distribution through the market has differential, often harmful, effects on the poorest and most exploited people and countries. For 'development', it is necessary to make the argument that equality is as important as profits, and that we should strive for a more reasonable balance of the two. Addressing poverty and inequality requires reexamining cultural values of markets and fundamental principles of social organization, reeducating ourselves about national and social relations, and revising popular notions of 'common sense' in ways that shift individual consciousness as well as popular discourse.

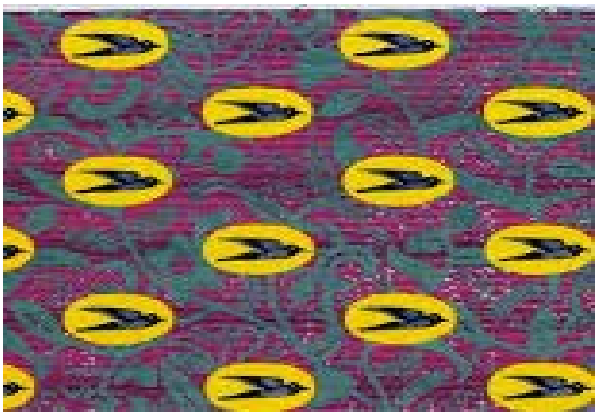
This project has sought to challenge inherited 'common sense' about 'Africa', 'development', 'traditional' dress and 'fashion', and attempted to cultivate more nuanced understanding of neoliberal consumer markets. The social relations and dynamics it reveals open more possibilities for inquiry. For one, the social relations of production and particularities of producers of *African print* in China remain largely unexplored. In addition, there are lingering questions about the citizen consumer: 'What responsibilities and concerns do *African print* consumers have in Ghana's textiles markets?' Also, how are tailoring and fashion design growing? What promise lies in the path of entrepreneurship? The ideas surfaced in this project provide fertile ground for future work, and the exploration of new questions.

APPENDIX A

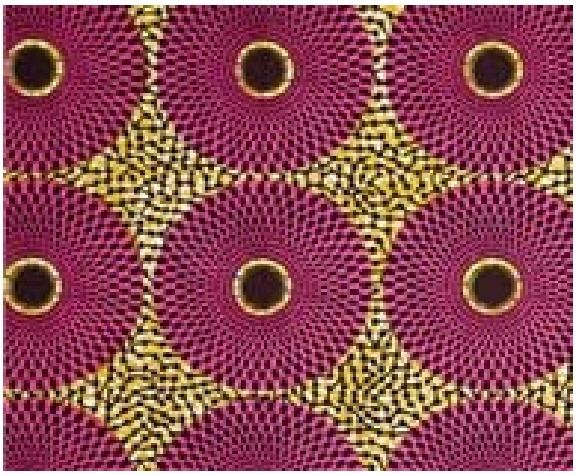
'Classic' *prints* with names in Ghana

1. **Angelina**
   - Named after the 1966 song by Clément Mélomé, see page 53 above.

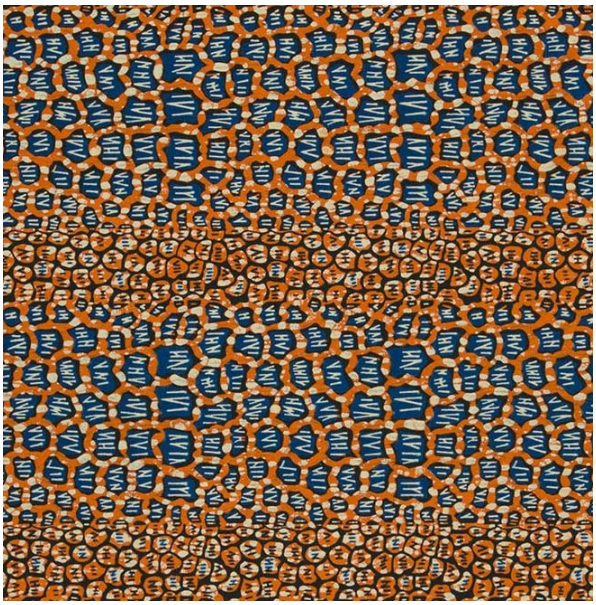
2. ***Sika wo ntaban*** – Money has wings.
   - Meaning, use money prudently, if not it can fly away.



3. ***Nsuo bura***, or ***Gramaphone apaawa***, or ***Nantwi bin***
   - *Asubura/Nsuo bura* refers to a water well, and in this context references a person as a 'well of wisdom' or knowledge.
     Gramaphone apaawa translates to Gramaphone disc and is a description of the *print* pattern.
     Nantwi bin literally means 'cow dung' and refers to the rivalry between wives which is like cow dung, the top may be dry but the inside is sticky.



4. *Efienyi abusia* – Stones that are close to you (can still hurt you).
    - The phrase refers to stones around a house or courtyard that hurt if kicked or stepped on. Figuratively, it means people close to you can hurt you.



5. *Ahene pa nkasa* - Good quality beads don't make noise.
    - Meaning, a person of substance does not have to announce themselves.

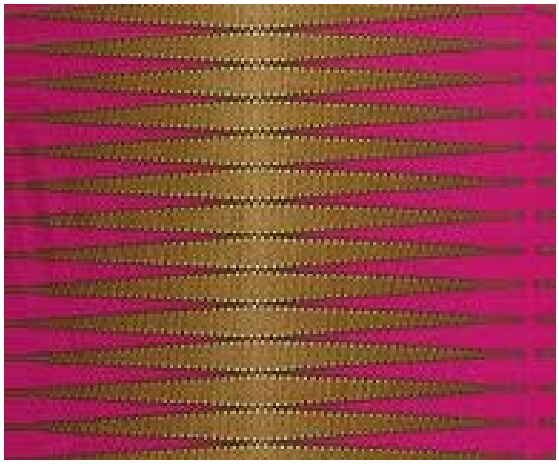
6. ABC, or *Suukuu nko ne nyansa nko* – School alone won't make you wise.

7. *Dua kur gye ehum a obu* – One tree alone cannot stand the storm.

8. *sɛ asa* – It is finished, or you got what you wanted.

9. *Gye Akongua* – The Golden Stool.

10. *Nkrumah's pencil.*



APPENDIX B

Photos of *African print* production, 2012

Above: L-R, Stretching cotton fabric prior to printing; Rotary screen printing

Below: L-RE, Hand-blocking *wax print*; Section of factory in disuse

APPENDIX C

Timeline of Dutch wax print production and the Vlisco brand

Year	
1678	Merchants with the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC), Jacob ter Gou and Hendrick Popta, anticipate big gains from cotton textiles manufacturing, and launch Europe's first cotton printing mill in Amrefoort, the Netherlands.
1750	More than one hundred cotton printing mills are in operation across the Kingdom of the Netherlands.
1820s	Belgian founder and owner of the Haarlemsche Katoenmaatschappij, J.B.T. Prévinaire, begins hand-printing imitations of *batik tulis* for sale in Java, known then as the Dutch East Indies.
1830	Belgium secedes from the Netherlands. With the split, the Netherlands loses a majority of its textiles mills.
1830s	Dutch King Willem I encourages establishment of more textiles factories, and appeals for mills to manufacture imitation *batik* for the Java market.
1846	Pieter Fentener van Vlissingen founds P.F. van Vlissingen & Co. as a printing mill in Helmond, and exports textiles to European as well as colony markets.
1852	Having succeeded his father as company director, Van Vlissingen Jr. receives samples of Javanese *batik tulis* from an uncle living in the Dutch East Indies. These samples inspire attempts to replicate the craquelé and irregularity of *batik tulis*.
1854	J.B.T. Prévinaire, Belgian founder and owner of Haarlemsche Katoenmaatschappij (HKM), successfully adapts a French printing machine to produce industrial imitations of *batik* called *wax print.*
1872	The Dutch Empire loses formal control of Java and commercial advantages, such as tariff exemptions on imports, diminish. As prices of Dutch imports rise and techniques for hand-made *batik* improve, the popularity of *wax print* in Java declines. Dutch manufacturers seek other markets, and find reliable consumers in West and Central Africa.

	Wax print begins to integrates into African textiles trade and dress cultures.
1890s	European manufacturers begin to adapt *wax print* to African tastes. Manufacturers copy patterns, styles and colors of indigenous textiles, and modify products based on cultural needs and preferences.
1918	HKM, the largest textiles manufacturer in the Netherlands and leading producer of wax print, shuts down in response to World War I blockades on exports. Two companies, Ankersmit and Van Vlissingen & Co., acquire copper printing rolls and ownership of popular wax print designs from the liquidated Haarlemsche Katoenmaatschappij.
1920s-30s	Economic pressures from the Depression force *Dutch wax* printing mills to close, only Van Vlissingen & Co. and Ankersmit stay in operation.
1932	Representatives from Van Vlissingen & Co. visit West Africa for the first time.
1950s-1970s	Demand for *Dutch wax* expands as world demand for African raw materials grows, local consumers acquire increased purchasing power, and African nationalist leaders and movements urge consumption of 'traditional' rather than 'Western' attire. Ironically, Dutch wax is incorporated into African independence movements as a symbol of African freedom. Ghana's government introduces industrialization policies with intentions of substituting textiles imports with local products.
1970	Van Vlissingen & Co. is acquired by Gamma Holdings and adopts the name Vlisco.
1981	Continuing a trend that started in the 1960s, world textiles centers relocated to low-wage manufacturers in Asia and Latin America, In response, Vlisco stops producing textiles for European markets and focuses exclusively on supplying textiles to African consumer markets.
Early 2000s	Vlisco sales in West and Central Africa show dramatic declines as inexpensive *African prints* (primarily from manufacturers in China) gain popularity. Vlisco's share of the market diminishes.
2006	On the advice of consultants from BrandWatch, Vlisco rebrands as a fashion house.

2007	Launching collections every three months Vlisco shifts to fashion-directed marketing themes. Collections are launched with a battery of fashion shows, lookbooks, billboards, and online advertising. Vlisco opens flagship stores in Democratic Republic of Congo and Togo carrying limited high-end prêt à porter fashion lines, and accessories including bags and scarves. Vlisco releases fashion 'looks', and expands corporate retail and fashion marketing.
2011	Vlisco introduces limited and luxury textiles editions for retail in flagship stores. The collection '*Trésor Brilliant'* spearheads the campaign, and includes lace textiles bedazzled with Swarovski crystals, golden beading, and intricate embroidery.
2012	Vlisco opens its inaugural flagship store in Ghana at the Accra Mall.

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[382] Timeline compiled using Warritay field notes, Arts 2012, Nielsen 1979, Rodenburg 1967, and Steiner 1985.

APPENDIX D

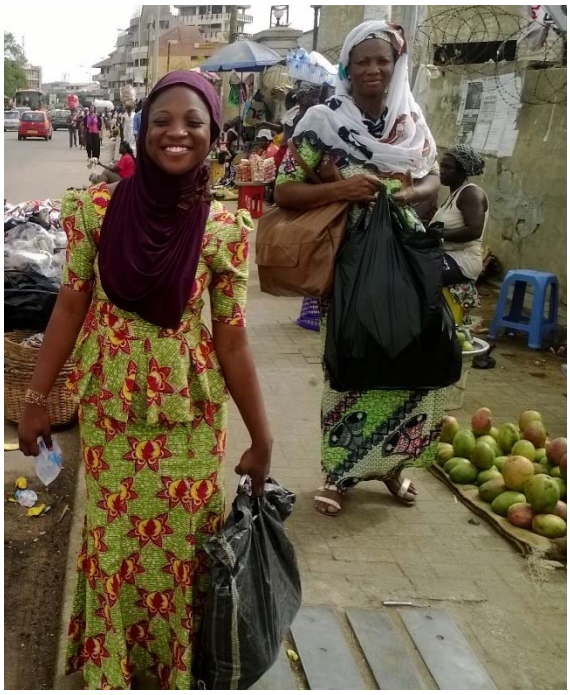
Figure **Fashion label *Konfidence, Accra Fashion Week 2012***

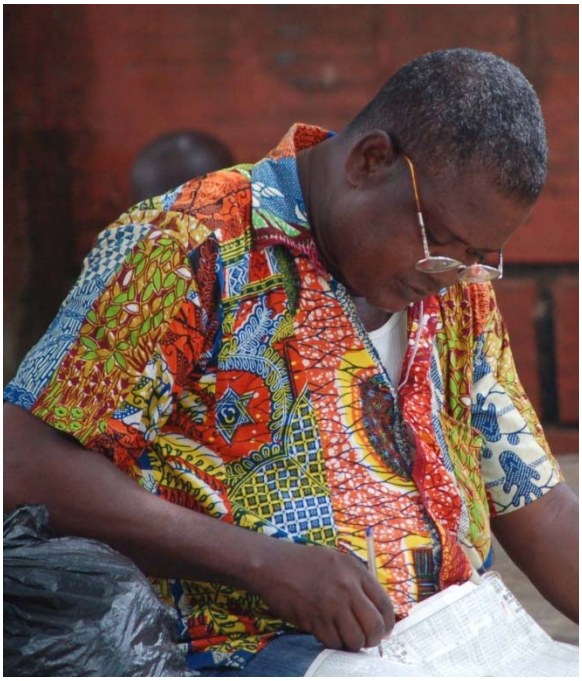
Figure
Fashion label Duaba Serwa,

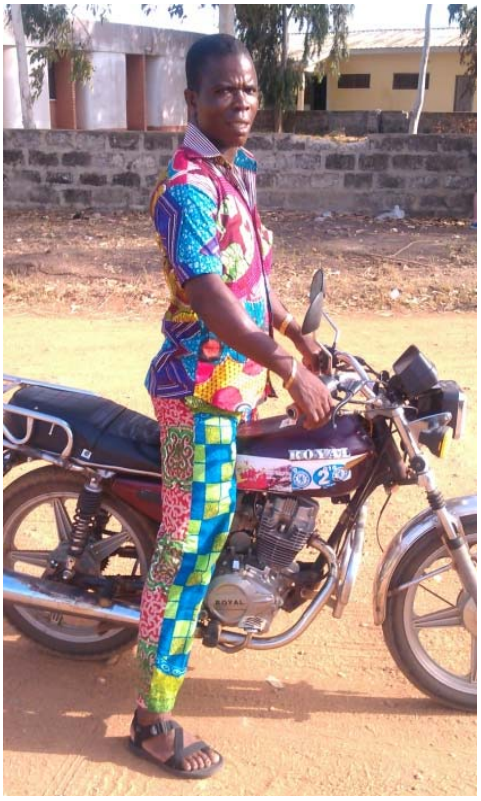
Figure
Event patron

APPENDIX E

***African print* street wear, 2012-2014**
Photos by author







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